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The Hamlyn History
of the World in Colour
Volume One

THE
AWAKENING
OF **MAN**



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THE AWAKENING OF MAN

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Introduction

By JOHN COLES

Many of man's achievements which are usually considered to be the products of civilisation were in fact the result of his activities as a nomadic hunter in prehistoric times. Moreover, a number of other important advances in human society were made almost as soon as the first peasant communities were founded. The achievements of man the hunter and man the farmer provide a background to the extraordinary advances made by urban societies in the ancient Near East.

Though man's presence on the earth is attested as long ago as 2,000,000 years, compared with the age of the earth itself, this is an insignificant period of time. What is it that has set man apart from his animal ancestors? The position in which man finds himself today, more powerful than all other living things, must be the result of his culture, of many millennia of traditions and experience, and not of his physical characteristics, which are in many respects inferior to those of other animals. The evolution of culture and the early history of human behaviour are the theme of this first volume in the *Hamlyn History of the World*.

Archaeology, which provides the bulk of our information about the culture of early man, is a complex subject, whether we study the remains of early hunters or the achievements of the pharaohs of Egypt, and scientific methods and equipment are applied to the evaluation of all aspects of the evidence.

From archaeological evidence it can be shown that the reason for man's behaviour in early times was the constant improvement in his way of life, an improvement brought about not only by the harsh realities of his environment but also by his own ingenuity and imagination. Archaeologists speak of revolutions in man's activities, periods when advances vital to his future were made, and although it is evident that the earliest revolutions—the neolithic and the urban—were the result of centuries of experience, nevertheless they stand out among the achievements of early man. Just as the establishment of farming led to the eventual development of urban communities, so the urbanisation of man provided the foundation for the later achievements of the Greeks and Romans.

Man's biological background played an important part in the development of human society. Man is a primate, and it is likely that his physiological development involved not only continuously potent males and highly receptive females, but also the neces-

sity for a lengthy nurturing period for the young. In addition, and unlike other primates of the present day, man relied at least in part upon animal food, more difficult to obtain than vegetable food and involving endurance and the exertion of male strength.

The result of these activities must have been a division of labour on the basis of sex, and it is probable that sexual partnerships comprising a single man and woman developed because of the difficulty of obtaining sufficient food. The problem of finding food would in itself tend to bring together men who could hunt more successfully as a group than as individuals. Such a group would develop characteristic and traditional modes of existence, in which social evolution as distinct from biological evolution would begin to play an important part.

One of the first necessities for the evolution of human society was speech, by which traditional methods of food gathering might be explained to the young, ideas transmitted and exchanges made. Such transmission of thoughts may well have led to the development of tool making. Although other creatures, both animals and birds, use material objects for immediate purposes, only man was able to produce tools to a standard pattern, and to arrange that such tools became traditional in both style and function. Equally important for the evolution of early man was his ability to adapt himself to varied environments. The result of this may be contrasted with the relatively static position of other primates, such as the great apes, which are confined to parts of Africa and number less than a million. These basic features of mankind—speech, tools and adaptability—had already become a part of man's cultural heritage 250,000 years ago.

The archaeologist tries not only to understand the major economic and political events of past times, events which in literate societies were usually recorded and which may be deduced through the excavation of prehistoric monuments, but also to appreciate the life of the anonymous people who made up the basis of these societies. The archaeologist tends, out of necessity, to overlook the private individual or the small family who may not have contributed anything original to human development. Those glimpses of hunters, peasants and shopkeepers which have been afforded through excavation of caves, farmsteads and urban houses, or through the recovery of such

items as toys and rattles in children's graves, underline man's petty interests, his loyalties, and his sense of frustration at the irrevocable nature of death. The deliberate burial of the dead, provided with food and equipment for an existence beyond the grave, must have stemmed from a desire to avoid what seemed to be the futility of life.

The life of the hunter must have been hazardous, but at least it guaranteed the freedom of the individual, and both danger and freedom of expression must have played their part in the appearance of religious concepts, art and music during man's existence as a hunter. Freedom in a permanently settled society, however, was not that of the nomad, and there is little doubt that the establishment of farming communities marked the end of leisure for the majority of people, who were destined to toil in the fields or pastures for the communal good. Such farming villages were probably at first self-supporting and independent of other centres of population, but provided a basis for the eventual growth of towns. With the emergence of urban civilisation, the personal freedom of the individual began to be eroded and, broadly speaking, this process continued until the establishment of more democratic institutions by the Greeks.

The development of urban civilisation represents a period when settled communities began to expand and to multiply in many areas. In Mesopotamia, cities such as Uruk (the Erech of the Old Testament), which eventually formed the Sumerian nation, had appeared before 3500 B.C., complete with elaborate temples, public buildings and an organised political system. The word 'city' should not be taken to indicate size so much as organisation. It would take only seven minutes to walk around the walls of Homeric Troy, and although the walls around Uruk were greater, the city itself was small by present standards. The Sumerian civilisation, like the civilisations of Egypt, involved much more than mere urban development and town planning.

With increased densities of population, such activities as pottery-making and metal-working could become the specialised pursuit of a few craftsmen. Trade in commodities and ideas, which had existed for many centuries on a small scale, could be expanded, and in towns it must have soon reached the stage of extensive and complex commercial transactions requiring written records and the services of scribes. Archaeo-

logy shows that a system of writing was first invented in Mesopotamia, in the early Sumerian cities.

At the same time, the growth of towns brought other rewards. For a few people, gifted in some way, urbanisation provided opportunities for them to be elevated as individuals to positions of power or prestige, which had hardly been attained in earlier societies. For a very small number of people the new circumstances permitted the accumulation of wealth which the greatest hunter could never have achieved, a durable wealth which could be transferred to succeeding generations. The treasure in the tomb of Tutankhamun in Egypt is a spectacular example of the accumulation of wealth for one individual, but its social implications are matched by Sumerian and Assyrian tombs where riches and, in some cases, servants were obliged to accompany their master into the afterlife.

Urbanisation also brought less attractive concepts into the lives of people. The contrast between those who led and those who laboured must have continued to grow, and the urban centres of Sumer, Assyria and Egypt contained slums as well as palaces. As disappointing to the student of human behaviour is the overall impression of apparently inevitable and unending conflict between different urban centres and between different nations. The history of Assyrian and Hittite conquests tells little of the human suffering involved in the seemingly endless efforts to extend and maintain territory. Yet it should not be forgotten that pressures of war generally bring out some of the best qualities in man, and it may be that knowledge of the use of iron was achieved through Hittite need in times of conflict.

War between groups of people probably had existed from the earliest times, but increased urbanisation brought concentrations of wealth and power which fostered endemic conflict. Territory, treasure, women, slaves—all were there for the taking. Devastation, disease and famine were part of the lot of the ordinary man. Such circumstances as these undoubtedly contributed to the increasing influence of religion as a supernatural means of escape from the problems at hand.

Man must always have been curious about past events. Knowledge was dependent at first upon oral traditions, later supplanted by written records of past events, and stimulated by the visible monuments of half-

remembered episodes.

Active interest in the past as a record of human behaviour is, however, of recent origin. The Greeks and the Romans acknowledged the existence of a remote past, but did not attempt to uncover the material remains of their ancestors. In the Middle Ages, any interest in the ancient world was effectively suppressed by teachings of the Christian Church which presented an ordered list of events since the Biblical beginning of the world in 4004 B.C. In the seventeenth century, however, the antiquities of the Classical world began to excite the imagination of scholars, and their interest was soon extended to western Asia and its riches. Knowledge of the antiquities of Egypt was obtained by Napoleon's expedition there, and at the same time, interest in the early history of Mesopotamia was aroused.

From 1860, excavations were carried out in Mesopotamia and Egypt. This date marks the beginning of gradual acceptance of the biological evidence for the great antiquity of man. Since then a century of excavation and research has enormously increased knowledge of human evolution. It can be seen that the legacy of the past does not extend only to Greece and Rome. The essential features of human society had been present for centuries before the rise of these Mediterranean civilisations. The Greeks and the Romans were fortunate in that they inherited the achievements of the ancient Near East, but they were also capable of developing their own concepts of human evolution. The awakening of man was an essential preliminary to the conscious development of those ideas of freedom and personal initiative that contributed so much to the development of mankind.

Magico-religious art in the caves of France and Spain includes this negative impression of a human hand, painted in the cave of Pech-Merle, Lot, France, about 20,000 years ago.



Man before History

Man emerges from primeval Africa; man the hunter explores the earth; the magic of cave art; man ends his wandering existence to become a farmer and finally a town dweller.

Man the tool-maker

The creature we call man, because he made tools, first appeared in Africa during the early part of the geological epoch called the Pleistocene or Great Ice Age. For many thousands of years they existed side by side with animals which, although similar in appearance, lacked this vitally important skill. With tools man could begin to control his environment and his fellow creatures. The most primitive stone axe, roughly chipped from a pebble, enabled him to gather food more easily by killing or collecting.

From his African homeland man the tool-

maker moved slowly into Europe and southern Asia. In successive migrations, which were virtually completed 250,000 years ago, he penetrated much of the Old World that was not covered by the periodic advances of great ice-sheets from the highlands to the north.

The appearance of *Homo sapiens*

In time the separation of primitive man into isolated groups led to the development of different physical types possessing varying cultures. New inventions brought a greater range of specialised tools, and a new form of

man, *Homo sapiens*, appeared on the scene. He was able to cope with the environment of northern regions and prospered both economically and culturally under the stimulus of colder conditions. He hunted such animals as the mammoth and reindeer and pushed as far north as the Arctic Circle and into the North American continent. However, in tropical Africa and the Far East, in areas where climatic changes, even seasonal ones, were not so marked, cultural developments lagged behind those of the north.

Burial rites and cave art

Perhaps the most significant event of this era was the emergence about 50,000 years ago of a belief in life after death, as shown by the careful burial of the dead with provisions of food and weapons. This tradition of burial opened the way to a fuller appreciation of the mysteries of life and death and stimulated the development in western Europe of the remarkable paintings and engravings of animals and other objects in cave sanctuaries. This art and its associated hunting and fertility rituals lasted for about 20,000 years until the end of the Pleistocene period—about 10,000 years ago.

It was at this time that the final melting of the ice-sheets which had at times covered

much of northern Europe and North America took place. The consequent changes in climate and vegetation led to the dispersal to the north-east of those animals which had flourished under colder conditions. Early man found it difficult to adapt himself to the new environment thus created and the economic and cultural groups into which he had been formed tended to break up. Although men went on to occupy areas from which the ice had retreated, in Europe at least human progress lost its momentum.

Agriculture and the domestication of animals

The next major advance took place in the Near East with the establishment of agri-



culture and the domestication of animals. This achievement was the result of centuries of specialised hunting and food gathering which had led man to concentrate upon those animals and plants that by their nature could most readily become useful to him. Varieties of wheat and barley were available in a broad belt stretching from Anatolia to Iran, and goats and sheep were even more widely dispersed throughout the Near East. The careful and persistent gathering of these resources led imperceptibly to cultivation and domestication. Once the implications of these novel ideas for food collection had been realised, a rapid transformation in human society took place.

The establishment of settled communities

The development of agriculture meant that a large population could survive on the produce of a relatively small area of suitable

land, from which unwanted plants and animals could be excluded. This concentration of effort upon a small area contrasted sharply with the traditional way of life of the hunter and a more sedentary form of economy emerged. The alteration in the structure of human society was relatively abrupt. In the Near East permanent settlements with stone-built houses and walls and towers were established by 7000 B.C., although only 1,000 years before this the indigenous economy had still followed the basic pattern of hunting and food gathering of the previous 100,000 years.

The development of farming and the establishment of permanent settlements transformed man's precarious existence as a hunter and led eventually to an increase in population. At the same time, the growth of a pastoralist economy made it possible for normally sedentary animals, such as

sheep and cattle, to survive, under human care, in new and alien environments.

Radiocarbon dating methods show that agricultural communities were well established in the Near East by 6000 B.C., and that the spread of agriculture to the north and west, bringing waves of new people into Europe, and possibly into North Africa, took place before 4000 B.C. The first movement of peasant communities into western Europe and into the Sahara was complete before 3000 B.C.


Well before this time, however, other important developments had been made in western Asia. Of the many advances which seem to have resulted from settled community life in this area, the making of pottery and the casting of copper and bronze were perhaps the most important. Hand-made pottery was being produced in many regions by 6000 B.C., and metal working was well established by the fifth millennium.

Linked with these developments was the

Long after agricultural practices had been introduced into Europe, isolated groups of hunters continued their traditional way of life. Among these were the inhabitants of the uplands of eastern Spain, who are commemorated by their decoration of rock shelters. The running, trousered figures, bottom left, are from Teruel province. All the other warriors are from shelters in Castellon province.

Far left: a cow from Lascaux, Dordogne, France, painted some 15,000 years earlier.





emergence of religious beliefs, which at first took the form of the widespread production of female figurines of clay, for use in fertility cults in the home at a time when agriculture was only newly established. Later, cult shrines were built for more complex rituals. At Jericho, a number of human skulls had facial features modelled in clay, with shells for eyes, and several had painted representation of hair. These heads may have been used for ancestor worship. At Catal Huyuk in Anatolia, a complex cult appeared involving female statues, leopards and vultures, as well as bulls and rams.

The development of urban civilisation

The growth of peasant communities along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, as in Egypt and in the Indian sub-continent, led to the establishment of urban societies. One of the greatest of these was the Ubaid, which appears to have first developed in 4000 B.C.

The area known today as the Sahara desert was periodically transformed into a relatively well-watered region with vegetation sufficient to support cattle and a pastoral population. Much of present-day knowledge about these people is obtained from the art which is found on rock surfaces in many areas, principally in the Tassili n'Ajjer. The representation of the herd of cattle and the two young women are from the Jabbaren area of Tassili, in Algeria.



at the head of the Persian Gulf. It was a simple agricultural community which flourished through the careful use of resources, the development of methods of water-conservation and irrigation of the adjacent semi-desert, together with the organisation of extensive trading connections. Eventually, settlements were made in the northern regions of Mesopotamia and the basis for historical Sumer was laid.

From this central area, it is likely that cultural achievements in architecture, writing, and modes of transport, were spread to North Africa, southern Europe and southern Asia. Fostered by the arts and crafts of these various regions, they gave rise to the civilisations which history has recorded.



The Achievement of Sumer

Civilisation established along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; the emergence of city-states; man invents cuneiform; the rule of Sargon of Agade; Gudea of Lagash; succession of the Amorites; the kingdoms of Assur and Babylon; Hammurapi conquers Sumer.

The land of Sumer

Where the two great rivers of Mesopotamia flow into the Persian Gulf, there stretches now a wide area of marshes, inhabited by the marsh Arabs. Above these marshes there extends northwards a flat plain through which the Tigris and the Euphrates flow. On the east it is bounded by mountains, on the west by desert, and on the north by the high mountains of eastern Turkey.

In the summer this plain is desperately hot, and no plant can grow unless it is watered, as no rain falls. Life on this plain is impossible without the water brought by the Tigris and Euphrates—names which they bore as far back as they can be traced. However, although, like the Nile, they flood when the winter snows melt in the mountains

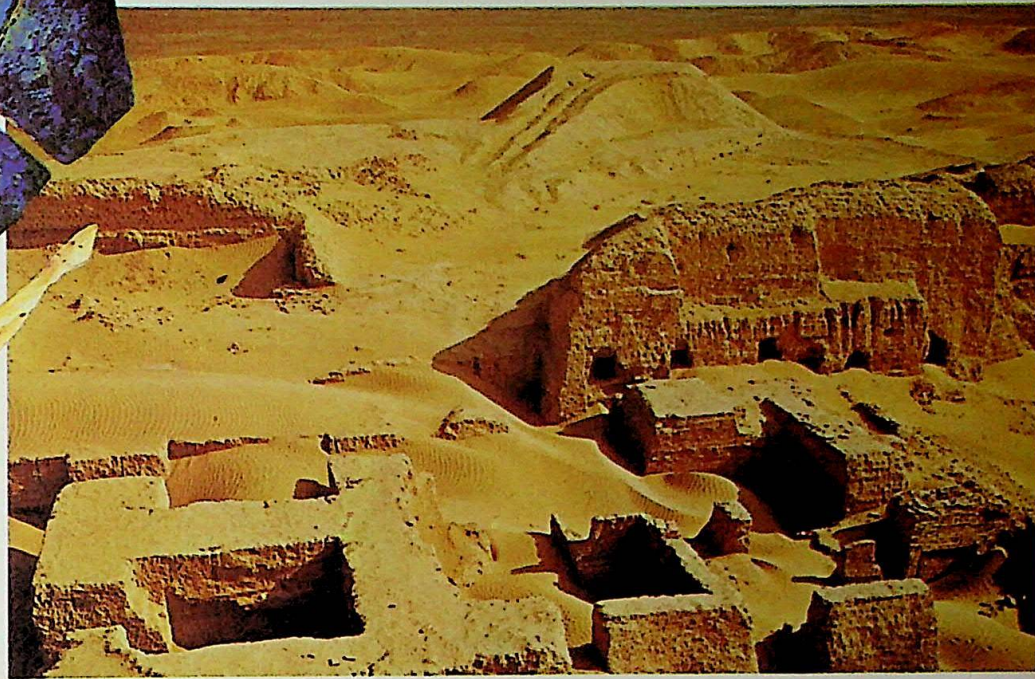
at their sources, unlike those of the Nile, the floods come at a most inconvenient time for the farmer. All the time his corn, sown in November, is growing, there is a shortage of water, but by March, when it is nearly ripe, the rivers are in full flood, and it is only with the greatest difficulty that the careful farmer can prevent their waters from sweeping over his fields and carrying away all his hard-earned crops.

The first inhabitants

It is, therefore, certain that the first people to live in this land—the land of Sumer—understood not only how to grow corn and other crops, but also how to control the rivers, by leading off water through ditches and canals when it was scarce, and by build-

ing dams and escape channels to keep the floods away from their fields. The challenge of the new surroundings and the need for mutual cooperation to make good use of the water supply must have acted as stimulants which helped to create the civilisation which was born there. The earliest period of which there is any record is called the Ubaid.

At this date, however, Sumer was no more advanced than the countries around it. They all shared a knowledge of agriculture, pottery, and even, to a limited extent, of how to work metals. In Sumer people built houses of mud bricks—the material of most buildings in the Near East to this day—and although their prosperity can have grown only very slowly, we can watch their temples being built again and again, each time a little larger and more splendid than the last. The



Above: the mud-brick cities of Sumer soon fell into ruin and weathered into the characteristic mounds or tells which dot the country today. Here the desert sands are engulfing once more the walls revealed by excavation at Nippur, the religious centre of Sumer.

Far left: war and fertility are among the commonest themes of Sumerian art.

wealth of the village shrine is a sure indication of the wealth of the worshippers who use it.

Uruk, the first city

Where all the land is flat and no single height or pass can command a strategic advantage over the rest of the country, only chance may determine where great cities will be found. Thus, throughout the history of Sumer, power and wealth shift from one city to another. Just before 3000 B.C. Uruk enjoyed a time of great prosperity, when a whole complex of elaborate shrines and temples within the city were built, some of a size comparable to a Gothic cathedral. Many of them, uncovered by archaeological excavations, show much of their original

decoration, with cones of various colours embedded like nails in their outer walls, making zig-zag bands of colour which resemble the trunks of palm trees when applied to the half-columns which form part of the façades.

Temple treasure

Buried among these ruins were some of the treasures of the temple. These included beautifully worked silver and copper animal figurines, inlaid stone bowls, and many other carved stone objects which were probably the products of craftsmen employed by the temple itself. The finest object of all was a stone vase, about three feet high, on the outer side of which are three bands of sculptured decoration showing a procession bear-

ing offerings. Sheep, goats and cattle, which with corn were the basis of the temple's wealth, form part of the procession; and at the head of the procession is the goddess Inanna, always the chief deity of Uruk. From Uruk, too, comes the first known piece of life-size sculpture, a wonderfully naturalistic head of a woman—perhaps a priestess.

The invention of writing

However admirable the vigorous, classical art of this period, it is not its most significant cultural feature. It is from Uruk at this time that the first written records have been preserved. A primitive form of picture writing, scratched in the damp clay of small square tablets, recorded lists of domestic items and



the dealings of the temples. Signs for sheep, pigs, and oxen, ploughs and boats, and for many other items indispensable to the agricultural economy of the temples can at once be recognised.

It is not possible to tell what language these first writers spoke because a picture of a boat indicates that they had a word for boat, but not what that word was. Very soon methods developed by the scribes to show the pronunciation of these signs made it possible to say that the language they wrote was Sumerian. It is therefore highly likely that the inventors of this script—and probably the first people ever to use writing—were the Sumerians.

The cuneiform script

The first examples of picture writing were drawn, often in considerable detail, in the clay, but, from at least 2000 B.C. onwards, a quicker method was in use which, while reducing the pictorial element of the sign, eased the process of writing. Instead of each

line being laboriously drawn, the triangular point of a sharpened reed was jabbed into the clay, while one edge of the reed made a tail to the triangle, which stood for a line in the original sign. Once this method had been adopted, curved lines were no longer possible, and this was the first step which converted quite recognisable pictures into clusters of wedge-shaped lines called cuneiform.

The cities of Sumer

Records of the period before 2300 B.C. come from various cities of Sumer: from Uruk, from Ur and from the ancient sites of Lagash and Shuruppak. Together they tell us much about the life of these first literate men. Although all the cities recognised their common unity, as Sumerian, and although the city of Nippur, with its god Enlil, was the religious focal point for all Sumer, there was no one seat of political power. Each of the cities or towns of Sumer was the head of a small city state, with striking resemblances

to the cities of Classical Greece, and as in Greece, there was continual bickering between neighbours.

One city state might obtain control over other, temporarily weaker, cities, and then its ruler might merit the title of 'king'. An example of the changeable nature of politics at this time is furnished by the fortunes of the city of Lagash: At one time the 'king of Kish', Mesalim, interceded in a land dispute between Lagash and its bitter rival Umma; a generation later, although still preoccupied with its dispute with Umma, Lagash, under the leadership of Eannatum, defeated a ruler of Mari, a city lying north of Kish on the middle Euphrates.

The *ensi* and his city

The Sumerian head of a city state was called an *ensi*, and it is clear that his power was considered to be delegated to him by the god of the city. He was the chief religious member of the community, and represented the people in his dealings with the city god. The



victory of one state over another was seen as a reflection on earth of similar events involving their respective gods. Moreover, the 'kingship' of Sumer, awarded by the god Enlil from his seat at Nippur, was also thought to be a matter decided in heavenly council.

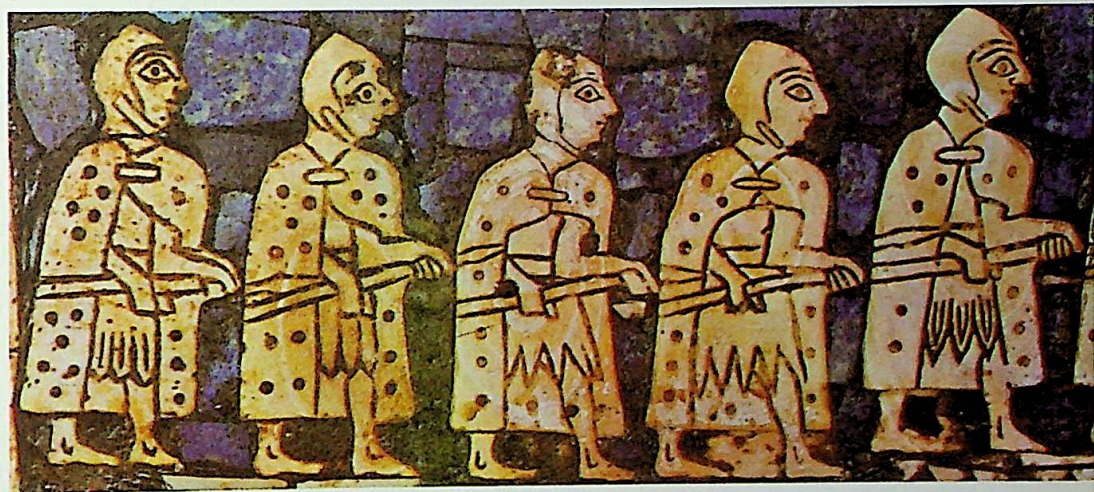
Interesting light has been thrown on the position of the *ensi* by excavations at the city of Ur. There a vast cemetery was discovered, which contained tombs so conspicuous for their ostentatious wealth that they can only have belonged to the members of a royal house. To accompany them in their afterlife the dead had been supplied with massive quantities of gold, silver, other metals and precious stone, worked exquisitely into jewellery, vessels, armour and even musical instruments. In addition to these, they contained grim evidence that slaves too were a man's possessions in ancient Sumer, and if the ruler was to live in the next world as he

had in this, then slaves must accompany him. In one tomb more than seventy bodies were found, lying neatly ordered outside the central chamber, which housed the king's body.

The temples also retained much of their wealth, and often had a considerable labour force to work their lands. Besides the staple corn, the temple priests cultivated dates, grew onions and other garden plants, kept herds, and ran fresh- and sea-water fisheries. Between them, the *ensi* and the temple exercised complete economic control over the city, and we even hear of priests participating in the local wars.

The empire of Agade

The minor squabbles of the Sumerian cities were dramatically cut short when Sargon I, the founder of the dynasty of Akkad, conquered them. Sargon had an Akkadian



Above left: after his victory over his rival Umma, Eannatum, the ensi of Lagash, erected a stele to commemorate the battle, called the 'Stele of the Vultures', because vultures are shown devouring the corpses. Here the Lagash infantry masses for battle. Above and left: Ur too shared the same fighting methods. These two scenes are from the Standard of Ur, a box-shaped object found in one of the royal graves.





name, Akkadian being a Semitic language, akin to Hebrew and Arabic, which had long been spoken in northern Sumer and was soon to replace Sumerian altogether. Sargon was most likely of Semitic race himself. He founded his own capital, called Agade, near Kish, and then, with astonishing speed, achieved supremacy over the whole of Sumer.

Sargon and his successors, of whom Naram-Sin was the most notable, controlled by military force an area which reached from Tell Brak, on the headwaters of the Habur river, down to Elam, where they held the local princes subject. Like the later kings of Assyria, they ventured as far as the Mediterranean, and drew on the cedar supplies of the Amanus mountains in northern Syria.

Internal unrest

Throughout the century or so of its domination, the empire of Agade suffered from internal dissensions. Instead of adopting the old Sumerian custom of exercising kingship

in Sumer, while leaving the *ensi* of each city more or less independent, Sargon and his descendants seem to have abolished the local dynasties, thus rousing the whole of Sumer against them. Another reason for Sumer's hostility towards Sargon, was that he diverted the Persian Gulf trade in copper, precious stones, and other luxuries to Agade.

Earlier, Ur and Lagash had almost monopolised this valuable commerce, which brought them into contact with the countries of Magan and Meluhha, and ultimately with the cities of the Indus Valley. The loss of this trade meant impoverishment for them. It is also possible that Sargon incurred hostility because he belonged to a different race.

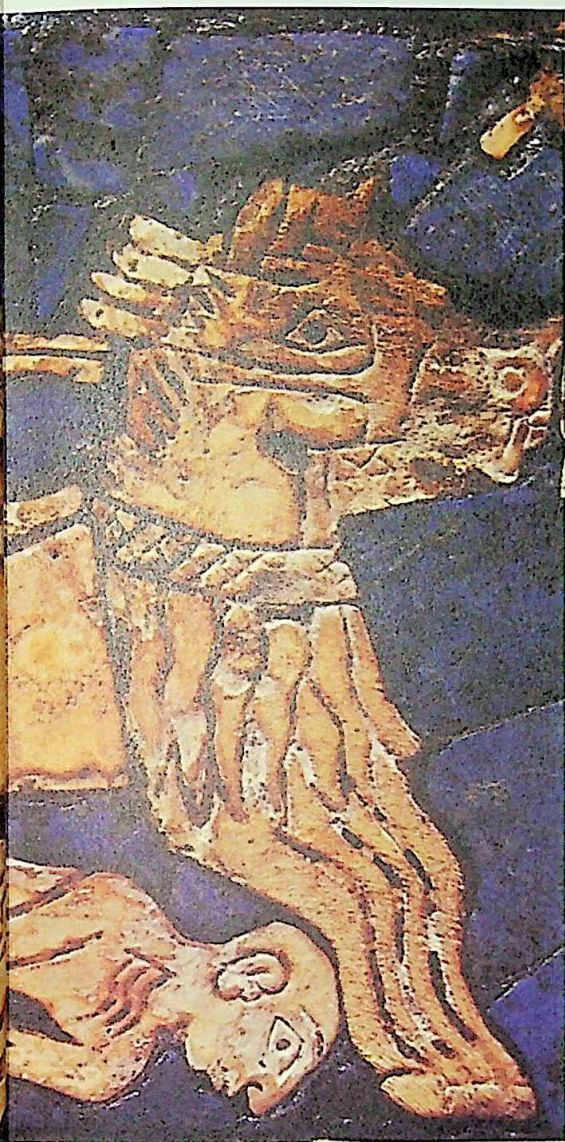
The Gutian invasion

The Akkadian empire fell as swiftly as it had risen. The period of its fall is poorly documented, but it is known that a people from the hills, called Gutians, were responsible for the final collapse (c. 2270). A later literary composition describes how the gods had

cursed Agade for impiety, how the 'fresh water of Agade turned to salt water' and how trade was interrupted so that 'long grass grew where the boats had anchored, the plants of lamentation grew where chariots had passed'. However, if the downfall of the dynasty was remembered, so were its achievements. Legends which have survived concerning the exploits of Sargon and Naram-Sin show that the example of conquest they set lasted longer in the memories of later generations than the fate which overcame them.

The Sumerian revival

Northern Sumer suffered the effects of the Gutian invasion more directly than the south. Soon after the invasion the ruler of Uruk in the south, Utu-hegal, relates how he defeated and captured the Gutian king. To judge from his fairly accurate account of the campaign, Ur and the old rivals Lagash and Umma, were also independent of the Gutian yoke, so that, at least in southern



Left: the Standard of Ur shows Sumerian chariots in action. The animals are not horses, but probably onagers, a sort of wild ass which roamed the Mesopotamian plains until the nineteenth century. The chariots have primitive wheels, spokes being a relatively late introduction.

Right: spearmen from the Stele of the Vultures wearing the characteristic Sumerian flounced skirts.

Below: provisions brought in for a victory banquet after the battle (Standard of Ur).





Sumer, life was resumed much as before, after the power of Agade had been broken.

Gudea of Lagash

During this period when the north was being ruled by the Gutians, Lagash flourished, particularly during the reign of Gudea, who is well known today through the many statues of him. In addition to more than twenty statues, some of which bear his inscriptions, there remain two large clay cylinders, which are inscribed with hymns relating to the dedication of a temple to Bau, the goddess of the city of Girsu in his dominion. He tells how he was instructed in a dream to build the temple, and then how he collected the raw materials to equip it. Wood from Elam, Magan and Meluhha, copper and blocks of stone, pitch or bitumen, were all brought in at the command of the goddess for the building of the temple. Gudea never mentions his relations with other cities, and he presents a picture of a self-sufficient community, desiring not to extend its boundaries, but to grow in wealth and piety towards the gods—always the necessary precondition of prosperity.

Birth of a new empire

Soon after Utu-hegal had broken Gutian power in Sumer, he himself was made subject to the *ensi* of Ur, Ur-Nammu. Although little more is known about this king's victories in Sumer, the situation when his son, Shulgi, succeeded him makes it clear that he had extended his control over most of the land.

According to Ur-Nammu's own account this control was not inhuman. In his introduction to the earliest known collection of 'laws' or regulations, he records, in phrases which recur throughout Mesopotamian history, his offerings to the gods, his establishment of law and order in the land, and his defence of the fatherless and the widow. One of the regulations by which he hoped to achieve law and order reads: 'If a man has accused someone of adultery with a free man's wife, and the accused has been cleared of this accusation by river ordeal, the accuser shall pay twenty shekels of silver'.

Growth of the empire

By wise government Ur-Nammu laid a solid foundation for his empire, and when Shulgi assumed power his chief preoccupation was



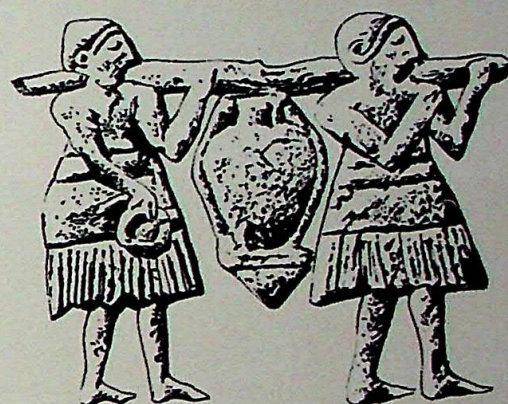


Left: scenes from the banquet on the Standard of Ur.

Below: a porter brings a heavy load which is strapped round his forehead.

Far left: two dignitaries are waited on by cup-bearers, while the harpists and singers (near left) entertain them. Harps with a sounding-box which ends in an animal's head were found in the royal tombs, and can be seen in the British Museum.

Below: in a similar scene carved on a stone plaque from the site of Khafajeh, a heavy jar is brought to supply the banqueters. The second porter carries an ingenious circular stand for the jar.



the maintenance of the frontiers which his father had created. In particular, much attention was needed on the eastern borders, where the tribes of the Zagros Mountains gave constant trouble. Year after year they were visited by punitive expeditions from the kings of Ur, but the nature of the terrain made a complete subjugation of the area impracticable. It is possible that the empire of the third dynasty of Ur extended as far as had the Akkadian empire.

While Ur-nammu seems to have left the local government of the Sumerian cities in the hands of their traditional rulers, Shulgi and his successors gradually transferred the posts of governor to their own nominees, and thus began to break down the traditional pattern of Sumerian city-states. Similarly, further afield, Assur on the Tigris and Susa in Elam were given governors appointed by the central authority at Ur.

Shulgi's domestic reforms

While the country's borders were being maintained attention was also given to internal administration, and here Shulgi was an undoubted innovator. Under his rule every department of government kept accounts, down to the smallest detail, of its receipts and issues of materials for which it

was responsible. There are records of yearly statements involving enormous quantities of foods, wool, metals and vast numbers of livestock, handled by the king's deputies. Smaller accounts deal with the issue of supplies to the many messengers who collected their rations at government stores along their route, and also with the organisation and payment of work on government buildings, canals and agricultural projects.

Collapse of the dynasty

Very soon after the accession of Ib-bi-Sin there are signs that all is not well. Tribute to the third dynasty of Ur from the outlying cities is no longer recorded in the lists, prices begin to climb, and by the tenth year of his reign starvation is threatening the city of Ur itself. The correspondence of Ib-bi-Sin with Ishbi-erra, one of his officials in the north, illustrates at once his desperate need for corn to feed the city, and the weakness of his control. Ishbi-erra describes the difficulties he encounters in gathering and transporting the corn, difficulties which are evidently much increased by the presence of hostile nomads who were apparently in command of the open country.

However, it was not these nomads from the western desert who dealt the kingdom of

Ur its death blow. At the end of the third millennium a marauding band from Elam, with assistance from the mountain tribes, overthrew and plundered the cities of Sumer. They occupied Ur and left a garrison there. Ib-bi-Sin, as later tradition records, was carried off to Elam where he spent his remaining days. For the Sumerians this reversal of fortunes could come about only as the result of a curse by the gods, and they felt that the moon goddess, Ningal, had deserted her city of Ur.

'The mother Ningal stands like an enemy outside the city, she weeps loud over her ruined shrine of Ur. "An [the chief of the gods] has ruined my city, Enlil has destroyed my temple, has struck it with his axe Earth has gathered in my city's canals, foxes have made their holes there"

The first 'dead language'

The downfall of the third dynasty of Ur entailed more than the collapse of a political structure. Although Sumerian had remained the official language of the empire during the reigns of the third dynasty kings, the last two, Shu-Sin and Ib-bi-Sin, bore Akkadian names. Very soon after the transference of power to the Amorite rulers Sumerian

ceased to be a spoken language, but it did not die out.

Most of the Sumerian texts which have come down were written during this Old Babylonian period by students and scholars who preserved the language and scribal traditions of their predecessors. Kings wrote their inscriptions in Sumerian, although often with an Akkadian version as well. The influence of Sumerian religion with its concept of a supreme god (Enlil) and its myths, which encompassed the idea of a search for eternal life, permeated all branches of cuneiform writing to the end.

The training of a scribe

A considerable amount is known about the schools of Sumer. At Ur archaeological excavations actually revealed a school-room with mud-brick benches in rows for the students and in the same room their exercises—round tablets with a sentence written by the teacher on the front and copied on the back, with varying success, by

the student. The schools also used long lists of words which the pupils had to learn by heart. They included legal terms, names of animals, plants and foods, and objects made of wood or metal. These lists are particularly useful for the modern scholar, especially since the scribes added to them the Akkadian translation of each Sumerian word. A favourite with the scribes was the proverb, and stories of school life, with the usual tales of bad behaviour and beatings, were also understandably popular.

Tales of gods and men

Among other texts which these early schools have preserved, the most interesting are undoubtedly the stories about gods and heroes. The series of legends which centre on the figure of Gilgamesh are strongly reminiscent, in their mixture of reality and fairy tale, of the poems of Homer. They are mostly short stories, each relating one episode, and concern such exploits as an expedition against the giant, Huwawa, in the Cedar



Far above: a craftsman crouches over his work. Detail from a baked clay plaque of the Old Babylonian period.

Above: evidence of the skill of the Sumerian sculptor, these hands rival in their formal lines the best Egyptian work. The hands belong to one of the many statues of Gudea, the ensi of Lagash.



Mountains, Gilgamesh's victory over the Bull of Heaven, sent against him by the love-goddess Inanna because he had rejected her advances, and a clash with his one-time overlord, the king of Kish, which is an illuminating account of inter-city politics in the pre-Akkadian period.

The stories about the gods are no less varied, and show a liveliness of invention hardly equalled by later, Semitic, writers. One, for example, tells of the rescuing of Dumuzi, a god of fertility, from the underworld, by his sister, who obtains his release by agreeing to stay there as his substitute for half the year, while he completes the other half. Sumerian also has the earliest known account of the great flood, and one man's escape from it in an ark.

The heritage of Sumer

The Sumerian language soon ceased to be anything more than a scholastic achievement. Nevertheless, the advances made by the Sumerians in technical knowledge, such as metal working, and their mastery of the sciences of irrigation and agriculture, laid the economic basis for the prosperity of Mesopotamia for thousands of years to come. Even the advent of iron hardly changed the way of life pioneered by the Sumerians in the third millennium B.C.

The Amorites

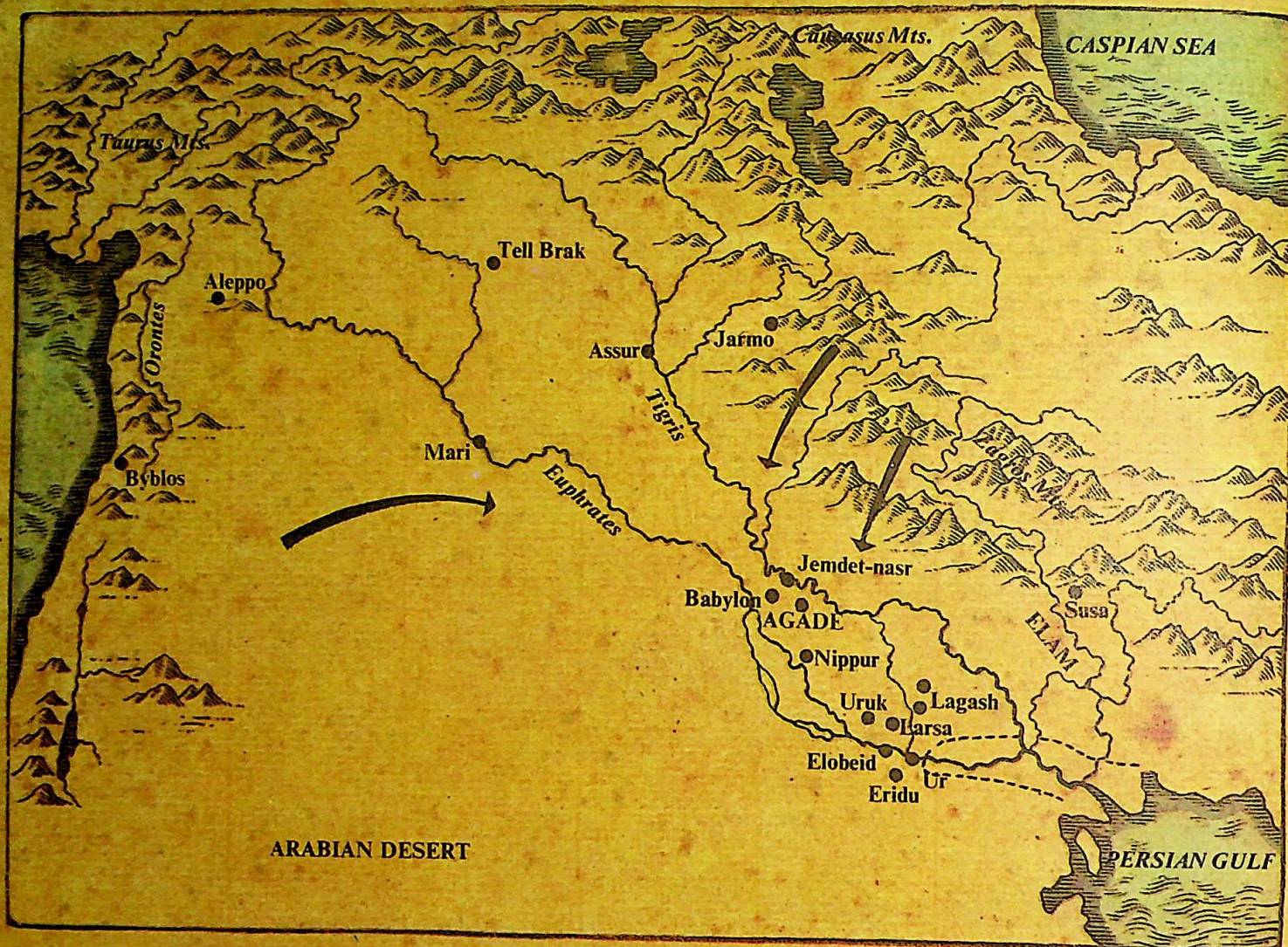
The chief threat to the civilisation established in the plain of Sumer came from the mountain tribes in the east and the nomadic tribes of the western deserts, who were torn between scornful distrust of the soft city dweller of Babylon and grudging envy of his wealth. Incursions by bands of these tribes, who spoke a Semitic language called Amorite, added to the anarchy surrounding the downfall of the third dynasty of Ur. Before Ib-bi-Sin's final defeat Ishbi-erra established himself as an independent ruler of the ancient city of Isin, and thus founded the first Amorite dynasty in Sumer.

The Amorites gained control of most of the old cities of Sumer and of many states which had once formed part of the Ur empire of the third dynasty, and so shared the same cultural heritage. After a period of confusion strong Amorite dynasties had

The palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari was decorated both inside and out with huge wall-paintings.

Below: a king pours a libation before a god who sits on a mountain which is indicated by a conventional pattern of scales. The king's own goddess stands behind him to assist, and an official holds fresh supplies. Right: another goddess in conventional pose.





Mesopotamia—in Greek, the land between two rivers—stretches like a corridor between desert and mountains, channelling the valuable trade from the south and east to the Mediterranean. Yet its situation leaves it particularly vulnerable to the desert nomads on its left flank and to the incursions of mountain tribes on the right.

become established in the south at Larsa (which had already defeated and annexed the kingdom of Isin), at Babylon in northern Sumer or Akkad, at Eshnunna, east of the Tigris and at Mari on the middle Euphrates. Amorite dynasties had also appeared around

the Tigris on territory which later became Assyrian, and there were, moreover, a host of smaller principalities scattered over northern Mesopotamia.

Mari, Larsa and Babylon

A letter from the palace at Mari shows the political conditions of the times. Each of the major kings has a following of ten, fifteen or (in the case of Aleppo in Syria) twenty client kings, an indication of how delicately the balance of power was preserved. Other letters from Mari record details of the town's dealings with the south, where the two chief powers were Larsa, under the rule of Rim-Sin, and its northern neighbour, Babylon, whose king, Hammurapi, had considerably enlarged his territory during his early years. Although he must have maintained cordial relations with Rim-Sin to his south, we suddenly hear of Rim-Sin's defeat and find that in the thirtieth year of

Below: two boxers in action. Old Babylonian period, about 1800 B.C. (now in the Louvre Museum, Paris).



SUMER FROM ITS ORIGIN TO HAMMURAPI

	Ruling cities of Sumer	Domestic history	Foreign history	Culture
3000 2900	Kish dynasties			Cuneiform writing First temples
		Struggles between the cities: Ur, Uruk and Lagash		
2600	1st Dynasty of Ur			Triumphs of Sumerian art — Royal tombs of Ur
2500 2400	Lagash 2nd Dynasty of Ur and Uruk		Infiltration of Semites	
2300	Lugalzaggisi Sargon of Agade	Unification of Babylonia under Akkadian rule		
2200	Naram-Sin		Invasion of the Gutians	
2100 2000	Gudea of Lagash	Sumerian revival Empire of Ur		Artistic revival Great ziggurat of Ur
1900 1800	Rise of Mari	Amorite domination	Emergence of Assyria	Royal palace of Mari
1700 1600	Hammurapi Samsuilunas		Aryans lay waste Iran Kassite invasion in Babylonia	Hammurapi's Code

his reign, Hammurapi is master of all Sumer. Later he extended his power still further, conquering Mari, and receiving the submission of Shamshi-Adad's successor in Assyria.

Hammurapi's laws

It was after these achievements that Hammurapi had a monument prepared which has preserved his fame more effectively than any temporal conquest. On a tall stele he inscribed a long and detailed description of the regulations by which he wished his country's laws to be administered. Some of the provisions are harsh, but it is more significant that recognition is shown of the distinction between intentional and accidental homicide or injury. Moreover, the position accorded by the code to women is a more honourable one than in many

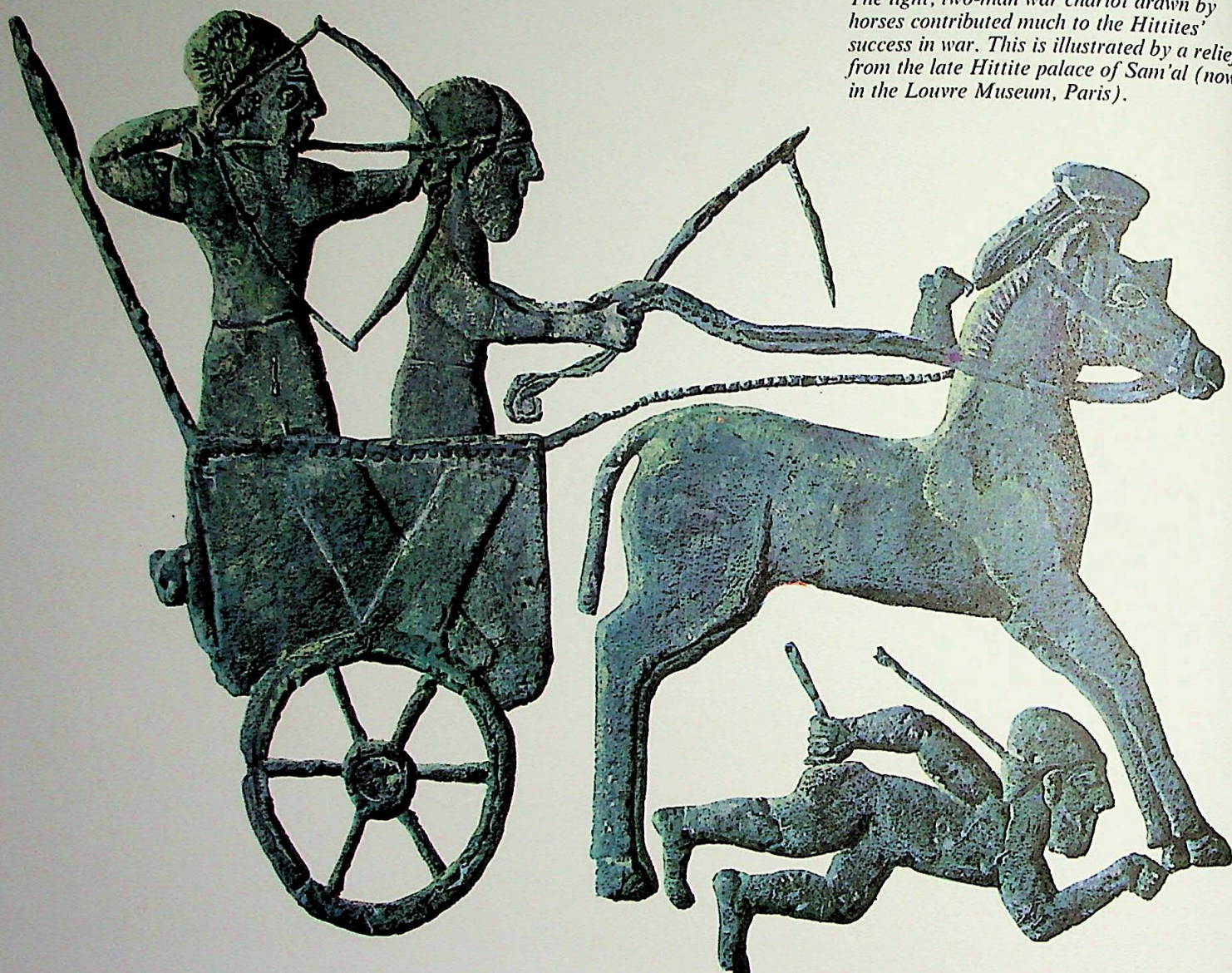
countries today. The code includes many detailed clauses about various classes and professions and this has made it a priceless source of knowledge about contemporary society. Although it is no longer the oldest code of laws known, it is by far the most detailed from ancient Mesopotamia.

The decline of Sumer

Hammurapi's conquests were the last great political event of his age. His successors gradually lost most of the territory he had so quickly won, although no power emerged strong enough to challenge the fading strength of Babylon. The lasting result of Hammurapi's campaigns is only to be seen later, when the pre-eminence which he had thus gained for Babylon, an upstart among the cities of Sumer, was reaffirmed by the succeeding Kassite kings, who chose it as

their capital, and fostered at Babylon the learned traditions of ancient Sumer. The conclusive proof of Babylon's political insignificance came only in the year 1595 B.C. when the Hittite king, Mursilis, swept down the Euphrates in a sudden raid, and sacked the national shrine.

The light, two-man war chariot drawn by horses contributed much to the Hittites' success in war. This is illustrated by a relief from the late Hittite palace of Sam'al (now in the Louvre Museum, Paris).



The Hittite Contribution

Assyrian merchants bring trade and culture to the city-states of Anatolia; the Hittite Empire conquers Syria and threatens Egypt; the empire crumbles before 'the people of the west.'

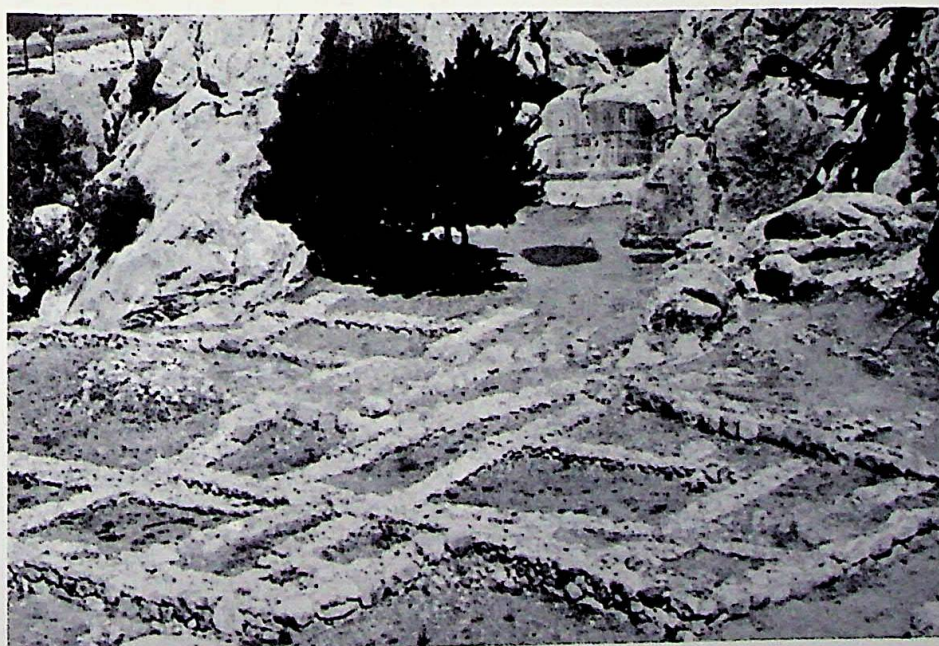
The Assyrian Colony period

The written history of Anatolia (modern Turkey) goes back almost to the year 2000 B.C. Even before that date a high standard of civilisation had been reached, but it was illiterate and has left no written records. Nothing is therefore known of the names of the peoples and cities, what languages they spoke, or what happened to

them. Shortly after 2000 B.C. however, we have the first group of written documents in the shape of the archives of the Assyrian merchant colony at Kanesh. These are written in Old Assyrian cuneiform script on clay tablets, which have been excavated by archaeologists from the area of the great mound which marks the site of the ruined city of Kanesh.

Thus it was that writing was first imported

into Anatolia from the land of its invention, Mesopotamia. The Assyrian merchants who brought it travelled across the wide plains and rivers of upper Mesopotamia, through the narrow passes of the formidable Taurus mountains and up to the Anatolian highlands, in search of the metals which their country needed—copper, silver and gold. To exchange for these they took the fine woven cloths of Assyria and another metal,



The map shows the world as it was known to the Hittites. Arriving in Anatolia from an unknown origin, they built their capital city at Hattusas. From here they marched through the passes of the Taurus Mountains to conquer the land of Syria, where Hittite kings were established in Aleppo and Carchemish. At one time a Hittite king even made an expedition down the Euphrates to sack Babylon. Later their chief enemies were the Egyptians, with whom they made peace after the battle of Qadesh. In Anatolia the Hittites never fully subdued their barbarous mountain-dwelling neighbours, the Kaska people, or their kinsmen, the Luwians of Arzawa.

Left: the foundations of the temple and the entrance of the grotto of Yazilikaya.



The Hittites fortified their cities with huge stone-built walls and monumental gateways. Above: the Lion Gate of Hattusas, so called from its guardian figures. Left: the figure of King Tudhaliyas IV holding his name and titles written in hieroglyphs.

tin, which they themselves imported from the East. In Anatolia they set up merchant colonies from which to conduct their trade. Kenesh was the greatest of these, and is today the best known. In these colonies, which were usually situated outside the walls of the native cities, the Assyrians lived and wrote down the details of their business transactions on clay, in the form of bills, receipts and letters.

These documents provide much information about Assyrian trade and the state of the country itself at that time. From them it can be seen that Anatolia like Sumeria was divided up into a large number of small city-states, each of which was governed by its own native prince. The cities mentioned are much the same as those also known from a later date. One of these merchant colonies was settled at the city of Hattusas, which was later to become the capital of the Hittite empire.

The texts give no direct information about the races and languages of the native peoples. However, a study of their personal names, as written down by the Assyrians, seems to show that there were already a large number of Hittites and their kinsmen, the Luwians, present in Anatolia, but that, as later, the population was very mixed. The population also included Hurrians, a people from the east, across the river Euphrates, and Hattians, who were perhaps the original inhabitants of the land before the Hittites arrived on the scene.

The local princes of the city-states seem to have been on the whole completely independent of each other, but the presence of the well-organised Assyrian traders forming a network throughout the country might have subjected them to certain pressures. However, there was a tendency for one or other of these princes to conquer the cities of his neighbours and then to assume the title of 'great prince', showing that he had succeeded in unifying at least part of the land. Some time after 1840 B.C. the city and merchant colony at Kanesh were attacked and burnt. It is not known for certain who was responsible for this but it seems likely that it was the work of one of the Anatolian princes who was attempting to assert his authority.

After a period in which the city stood deserted and in ruins, the Assyrian merchants returned and continued their trade. There then appeared on the scene a prince whose exploits exceeded all those of his predecessors and which were remembered even in the days of the Hittite empire. His name was Anittas, of the city of Kussara, and his own narrative of his deeds is preserved on a tablet from the Hittite royal library. He seized the city of Kanesh, known in Hittite as Nesa, and made it his capital. He subjugated all the other cities, taking for himself the title of 'great king'. He destroyed the city of Hattusas and put a curse on it, sowing the ruins with mustard seed.

The Hittite Old Kingdom

It is not known what became of the dynasty of Anittas after it had been transferred from Kussara to Kanesh. The second settlement at Kanesh was once again burnt and abandoned for a long period. It was during this time that the mass of the Hittites must have arrived in Anatolia, and when historical records begin again, some time after 1700 B.C., a Hittite kingdom proper has been established. For more than sixty years archaeologists have been excavating the ancient city of Hattusas, the Hittite capital, near the modern Turkish village of Boghazkoy. There they have discovered a huge mountain stronghold, surrounded by massive walls more than two miles in length, pierced by at least seven gates.

Inside these walls lies the ancient citadel, perched on a rocky crag with the remains of the Hittite palace and guard-houses, and below this in the lower town an enormous temple dedicated to the storm god, the head of the Hittite pantheon. At some distance outside the walls, at a place now known as Yazilikaya ('inscribed cliff'), another temple was found standing in front of a rocky grotto, the sides of which were decorated with processions of Hittite gods leading up to the central scene where the storm god faces his consort.

In the ruins of the palace and the temple of the storm god excavations have revealed thousands of clay tablets and fragments. These formed part of the great royal library and archives of the Hittite empire. They were written in the cuneiform script borrowed from Mesopotamia, for the most part in the language which is now known as Hittite. The Hittite people, however, called their language 'Nesite' (i.e., the language of the city of Nesa), and their kingdom 'Hatti', borrowing the name from the previous inhabitants of the land. Thus it was that their neighbours, the Babylonians and Egyptians, called them 'the people of Hatti', while to the Hebrews of the Old Testament they were the 'sons of Heth', from which the modern term 'Hittite' is taken.

This language, Hittite, was deciphered in 1916 by a Czech scholar, and proved to be an Indo-European language—that is, related to Latin and Greek. Other languages used in Hatti were Luwian and Palaic, which were closely connected with Hittite. The language of the previous inhabitants of the land, known as Hattian, was partly remembered and used for ritual purposes. The Hittites also employed the language of their eastern neighbours, the Hurrians, and, more especially, the language of Mesopotamia, Akkadian, which was in general use among the powers of the Near East for the writing of letters and drafting of treaties.

Although the Hittites remembered Anittas as the 'great king', they regarded Labarnas as the founder of their kingdom. He was a legendary figure whose name was used as a

title by all subsequent Hittite rulers. His successor, Labarnas II, was the first historical Hittite king. This Labarnas moved his capital from Kussara to Hattusa, from which he took the name Hattusilis by which he is usually known. By a series of hard-fought campaigns he united central Anatolia into the kingdom of Hatti and carried his forces eastwards through the Taurus mountains as far as the Euphrates.

His heir and grandson Mursilis in a short but glorious reign won victories for Hatti never again equalled. After defeating the Hurrians in Syria and destroying the city of Aleppo, he marched down the Euphrates against Babylon, where he brought to an end the declining dynasty of Hammurapi (about 1595 B.C.). He did not attempt to hold conquered Babylonia. Leaving the enjoyment of his victories to others, he returned to Hattusas where he was murdered in a palace conspiracy.

This led to some 200 years of weakness and confusion in Hatti. At home conspiracy and murder flourished within the royal family and abroad revolts in Hittite-held territories and incursions of hostile peoples from the mountains threatened the state. Even the sequence of kings would have been lost but for the work of one significant king of the period, Telipinus, who must have reigned about 100 years after Mursilis (c. 1500). He not only succeeded in temporarily securing the country's safety against attack but also attempted far-reaching internal reforms. It is to the 'Decree of Telipinus', which sets out his reforms, that we owe most of our knowledge of earlier Hittite history. The purpose of his reforms was to re-establish the position of the king against the threat of murder and usurpation and to enlist the assembled nobility in his support.

The Hittite empire

The century following the death of Telipinus is very poorly documented, even the exact number and order of kings being uncertain. The evidence available seems to show that it was a period of growing weakness when Hatti was faced with a severe crisis with all its enemies attacking at once. These included the Luwians to the west, the barbarous mountain-dwelling Kaskas in the northern province and further east across the Euphrates the Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni, which was at its height of power, having won control of the Syrian cities which had previously been dominated by Egypt. Such was the desperate situation which faced Suppiluliumas, the king who checked the period of decline and inaugurated two centuries of an expanded Hittite empire.

Suppiluliumas came to the throne about 1380 B.C. after his elder brother, Tudhaliyas 'the younger', had been assassinated by the army. His first task was to secure Hatti against the attacks of its neighbours and this required many years' fighting. Looking

beyond this, however, he realised that his country's strength must depend on Hatti's domination of Syria, so to this end he directed the major effort of his reign.

In a series of wars he broke the power of Mitanni. He installed his sons as kings of Aleppo and Carchemish, and bound other Syrian princes to himself as vassals by means of treaties. Egypt under the declining Eighteenth Dynasty was too weak to interfere. In fact, an Egyptian queen, the widow of Tutankhamun begged Suppiluliumas for one of his sons in marriage to become king of Egypt. In about 1336 B.C. Suppiluliumas died of plague which the army had brought back from the Syrian campaigns.

His heir, Arnuwandas II, also succumbed to the plague shortly after his accession and was succeeded by his brother Mursilis II. Mursilis proved to be as able as his father in handling an almost equally difficult situation. Preoccupied with Syria, Suppiluliumas had allowed the security of Anatolia to deteriorate once more, and at his death, Arzawa, never properly subdued, revolted again. Mursilis spent the first ten years of his

reign campaigning in western Anatolia and also in the north against the ever restless Kaska people. Later in his reign he had to face a crisis in Syria on the death of his brother, the king of Carchemish, but the structure of the empire bequeathed to him held together and he was able to maintain it.

Some interesting personal details have been preserved about Mursilis, who seems to have been particularly superstitious. He attributed the plague which was ravaging Hatti to the wrath of the gods for the impious assassination of Tudhaliyas the Younger, and attempted to appease them with long and abject prayers. At one critical moment, with trouble impending on the northern frontier and in Syria, he attributed his predicament to the neglect of certain rites of Suppiluliumas, and hurried off to perform them, leaving the fighting to his generals.

He was on the worst possible terms with his mother, accusing her of bringing about the death of his wife by black magic, and also of afflicting him with a curious speech impediment (perhaps the effects of a slight stroke). For this impediment he also blamed

the wrath of the storm god, and therefore went through elaborate purification rituals 'written down on an ancient tablet'. He died in about 1310 B.C. after a reign of some twenty-five years.

His son and successor, Muwatallis, seems to have maintained the power of Hatti in Anatolia without any drastic measures. In this he was much assisted by his younger brother, Hattusilis, who had command of the northern frontier. During the reign of Muwatallis, however, the Egyptian interest in Syria revived under the vigorous kings of the Nineteenth Dynasty. This led to the great battle of Qadesh in 1300 B.C. between Muwatallis and Rameses II. The boastful terms in which the Egyptian king described this engagement concealed his defeat, which he barely saved from becoming a disaster. The Hittite grip on Syria remained firm and its frontier post at Qadesh was quite undisturbed.

Muwatallis died in about 1294 B.C. and was succeeded first by his illegitimate



young son, Urhi-Teshub, and then by his uncle, Hattusilis, who seized power and exiled Urhi-Teshub to Cyprus. Hattusilis made peace with Rameses of Egypt in a famous treaty of 1284 B.C., preserved in Egyptian and Hittite, which acknowledged the Hittite possessions in Syria and Palestine. Hattusilis also made an alliance with Babylon. These pacific gestures were designed to secure his kingdom against a new and dangerous enemy from the east, the Assyrians.

Tudhaliyas IV succeeded his father, Hattusilis, in about 1265 B.C. Late in his reign the Assyrian, Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244

1208 B.C.), crossed the Euphrates in a great raid in which he carried off nearly 30,000 Hittites. The Hittites responded by compelling their Syrian vassals to place a trade embargo on Assyria.

A more serious threat to Hatti than the Assyrians (and ultimately to prove fatal) now appeared on the west. On the edge of the Hittite world there had always existed a country which was known to the Hittites as 'the land of Ahhiyawa', and where the king was a 'great king', the equal of the Hittite king himself. It has been suggested that the people of Ahhiyawa were the Achaean Greeks who were known to Homer as the

Scenes of family life in the late Hittite period.

Above: the children of King Araras of Carchemish playing with their toys (relief in the Hittite Museum in Ankara).

Above right: mother suckling her child (relief from Karatepe).



'Achaiwoi'. The most that can be said for certain is that the two names are very likely the same, but it does not seem that Ahhiyawa could have been situated as far away as Mycenae. It seems more likely that Ahhiyawa was a settlement of Mycenaean Greeks on the coast or islands of Asia Minor.

In the reign of Tudhaliyas IV the king of Ahhiyawa engaged in plotting with Madduwattas, a western vassal of the Hittites. He also appeared to be fomenting trouble in Arzawa, which rose in revolt. Tudhaliyas fought against Arzawa and invaded Cyprus, the first serious attempt at an invasion by sea made by the non-seafaring Hittites. This was the first extension of the empire since the days of Mursilis II.

When Tudhaliyas IV was succeeded by his son, Arnuwandas III, the position of Hatti had deteriorated. The effects of the Arzawan campaign were slight, and there soon appeared an alliance between Madduwattas and the kings of Ahhiyawa and Arzawa. Arnuwandas, dying childless after a short reign, was succeeded by his brother, Suppiluliumas II, who, in spite of his illustrious name, was unable to face the gathering storm. Little is known about his reign or the disaster in which it ended. The Hattusas archives, as is typical of all ancient records, break off before the final collapse. All that is known is that the cities of the Hittite empire were ruthlessly sacked and burnt about 1200 B.C. and the political domination of the Hittites in Anatolia was destroyed for ever.

Judging from Assyrian records it seems that it was the Phrygians who were responsible for the downfall of the Hittites, and, after a lapse of some four centuries, succeeded in rebuilding an Anatolian empire of their own under King Midas. The Egyptians, however, attributed the disaster to the 'peoples of the sea', who later attacked their own country.

The achievements of the Hittites

In religion and general culture the Hittites were very much a part of the world in which they lived. Their chief god was the storm god, the wielder of thunder, who was worshipped under different names in different countries. His wife, too, was acknowledged as a powerful goddess. Besides these, a vast number of lesser gods, described collectively as the 'thousand gods of Hatti' also received attention. The king acted not only as the commander of the armies and chief judge, but also as high priest. The queen, too, took an important part in religious and other matters.

Just as the Hittites had borrowed their writing from Mesopotamia, so they also borrowed literary forms such as the writing of letters, treaties and laws. Mythological poetry was translated directly into Hittite from Akkadian and possibly from Hurrian.

The royal hunting of lions by kings was a traditional sport in the ancient Near East. A late Hittite king of Melid shoots a lion from his chariot with a bow and arrow. Background: reconstruction of a Hittite walled city.



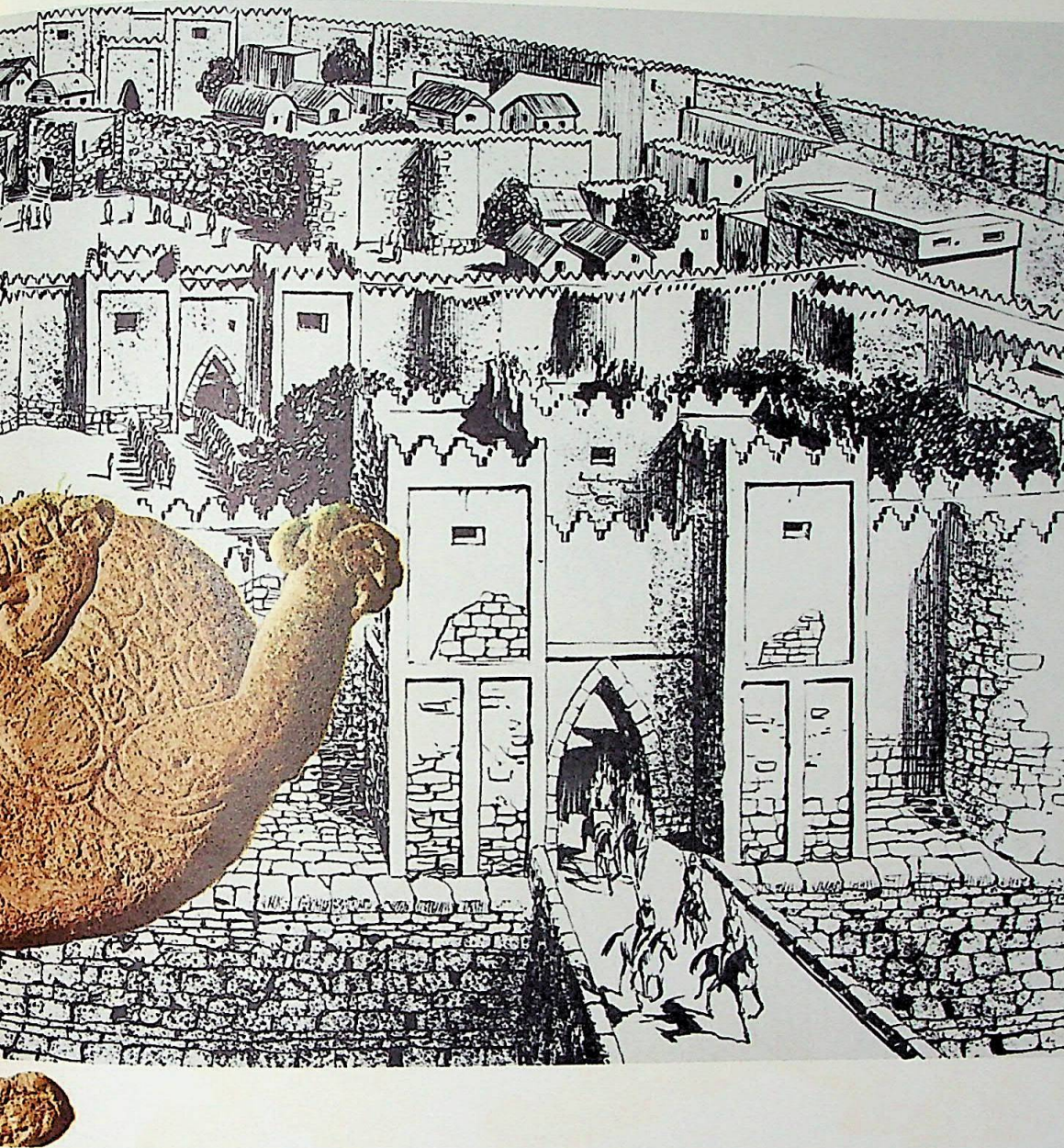
The Hattusas library seems to have been the creation of one of the later kings, probably Hattusilis III or Tudhaliyas IV. However, the Hittites did not only borrow, but also added to the tradition. The first recorded example of an early type of historical writing, in the form of yearly annals of the king, comes from Hatti.

It is clear from their achievements that the Hittites had good armies and disciplined soldiers. The king as commander-in-chief was supported by a bodyguard of courtiers and nobles. The Hittites made great use of chariots and were in fact among the earliest peoples to introduce the horse into the Near East. Their own cities were fortified with huge walls, and they were able to capture those of their enemies by siege-warfare. As victors they seem to have been generally

merciful, governing their empire through a loose system of vassals bound to them by treaty. This, however, may have been a weakness, for the empire seems to have disintegrated very rapidly as a result of the rebellion of the western vassals.

The late Hittite states

The western and central areas of the Hittite Empire fell to the Phrygians, who had come from Thrace at the time of the great Aegean migrations of about 1200 B.C. However the Hittites maintained themselves in the old south-eastern region, which split up into small city-states. To the east these were threatened by two great powers. In the Armenian mountains the kingdom of Urartu (the Old Testament Ararat) had appeared.



created by a people related to the Hurrians of a previous age, and in northern Mesopotamia Assyria was once again expanding after a period of decline. These two powers constantly fought each other, not directly but through the Hittite states, which occupied an area in which both were concerned.

South of the Hittites were similar small city-states in Syria and Palestine, occupied by Aramaeans and Hebrews, who had settled there in the dark age after 1200 B.C. In this precarious situation the Hittite states preserved a culture which had close links with that of the empire. The kings continued to use many of the ancient names, and Hattusilis, Mursilis, Suppiluliumas and Muwatallis reappear in garbled forms.

The same gods were worshipped, especially the storm god and personifications of

the sun and moon. The kings usually contented themselves simply with the title of 'king' or even 'ruler', but occasional claims to be 'great king' suggest memories of their imperial past. They fortified their cities and built themselves palaces in the traditional style, taking particular care to adorn the gateways and entrances with sphinx-like beasts and scenes sculptured in relief.

The greatest of these states was probably Carchemish, on the crossing of the Euphrates, which carried on the tradition of being the seat of the Hittite king in Syria. Further up the Euphrates was the kingdom of Kummuh, and in the foothills of the Taurus mountains were the states of Melid and Gurgum. The state of Sam'al was an anomaly, being firmly Hittite by geography and tradition but ruled by an Aramaean

dynasty which wrote Aramaic. Across the Taurus mountains, the land of Tabal included various of these late Hittite states at various times, and to the south of Tabal, the Hittite city of Tuwana continued an independent existence.

The amount of tribute and booty exacted from them by the Assyrians shows that these states possessed considerable wealth. However, the Assyrians did not find them easy subjects. Three Assyrian kings were particularly concerned with the Hittites. Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) was the first to

compel them to pay heavy and regular tribute, although he hardly penetrated across the Taurus to Tabal. His weaker successors left the Hittites in peace for a century. It was Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) who once more brought them under Assyrian control.

The harshness of the tribute he imposed led to frequent Hittite revolts. Sargon II (721-705), who inherited the Hittite states governed by tributary kings, dealt with unrest in a ruthless Assyrian manner. After each revolt he would sack the cities, exterminate the royal house and deport the entire

population, resettling the area with Assyrian colonists and placing it under an Assyrian governor. During his reign all the surviving Hittite states suffered this fate, and this was in effect the end of them. Thereafter occasional revolts were led by men who had Hittite names, but as a nation and a people the Hittites were dispersed, never to reappear upon the scene.





Some features of Hittite religion are illustrated in the reliefs.

Far left: the late Hittite king, Warpalawas of Tuwana, faces Tarhunda, the storm-god, bringer of abundance, who carries grapes and corn (rock relief at Loric).

Left: tombstone showing the scribe, Tarhupiyas, with his mother, or perhaps a goddess (relief in the Louvre).

Below: two heavily-armed Hittite warriors from a relief from Carchemish.



HITTITES, PHOENICIANS AND HEBREWS

	Hittite rulers	The Hittites and the outside world	Neighbouring countries	Phoenicians and Hebrews
1900	Anittas as Great King			
1800		Destruction of Kanesh		
1700	Hittite Old Kingdom (1700-1500 B.C.) Hattusilis I Mursilis I	Mursilis' raids in Babylonia		
1600	Telipinus		Kassites at Babylon New Kingdom in Egypt	Hebrews in Egypt Trade between Byblos and Egypt
1500	Hattusilis II	Height of Mitanni power	Thuthmosis III Amenophis II Amenophis III	Rivalry of Ugarit, Arvad, Byblos, Tyre and Sidon
1400	Hittite Empire (1380-1200 B.C.) Suppiluliumas I (d. c. 1336) Arnuwandas II Mursilis II (d. c. 1310) Muwattallis (d. c. 1294)	Decline of Mitanni Pacification of Anatolia Conflict with Egypt	Amenophis IV Advance of Assyria Rameses II	Completion of the Phoenician alphabet
1300	Urhi Teshub Hattusilis III (d. c. 1265) Tudhaliyas IV (d. c. 1230) Arnuwandas III Suppiluliumas II	Kadesh War against Assyria Invasion of the peoples of the sea: Fall of the Hittite Empire	Assyrians expelled by Babylon	Moses: establishment of the Hebrews in Palestine
1200	Small Hittite kingdoms remaining in Anatolia		Rameses III Assyria and Babylonia sacked by invaders	Destruction of Phoenician cities Period of the Judges Dominance of Tyre and Sidon
1100				Samuel Saul: war against the Philistines
1000	Late Hittite States (1000-700 B.C.) Hittite territories still surviving in Anatolia		Rebuilding of Assyrian power	Hiram of Tyre Division of Israel and Judah
900		Shalmaneser III subjects Hittites to tribute		
800		Tiglath-Pileser III reconquers Hittites		
700		Sargon destroys Hittite states		

The Might of Assyria

Assur the cradle of Assyrian civilisation; Assyria gradually expands; dark ages follow the Aramaean invasion; the conquest of Tiglath Pileser III. The invasion of Egypt; Assur-bani-pal's library at Nineveh; the decline of Assyria; Nebuchadnezzar embellishes Babylon; Babylon yields to the Persian Empire.



Light-armed Assyrian infantryman of the time of Tiglath-Pileser III (from Til-Barsip, Aleppo Museum).

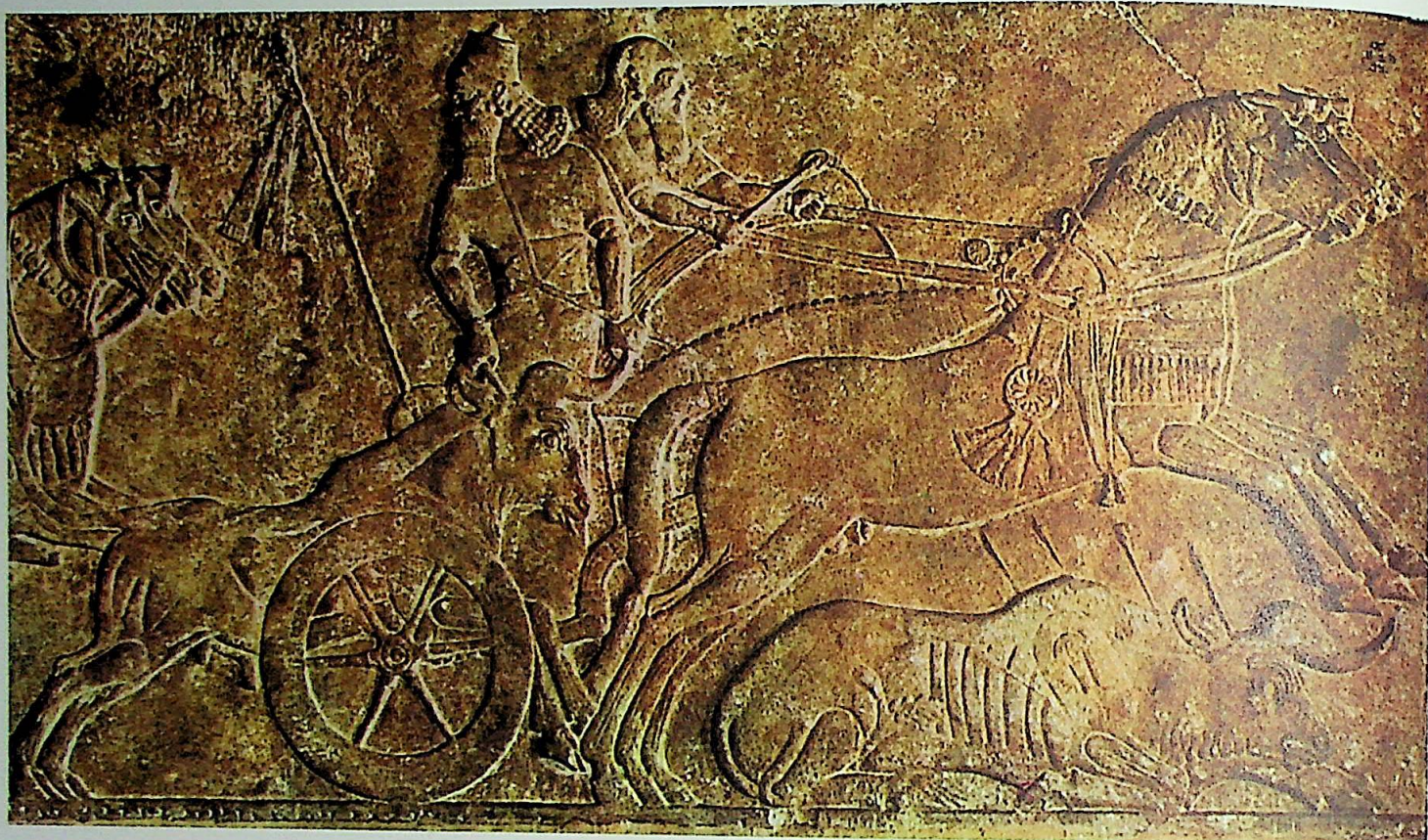
The Assyrian homeland

The natural division of modern Iraq into a northern district centred on the city of Mosul, and the southern plain with its capital at Baghdad, marks a difference which in earlier times was reflected in the political units of Assyria and Babylonia. Although Assyria's capital city, Assur, was far to the south on the Tigris, the agricultural nucleus of its empire lay in the fertile lands east of the river, and especially in the triangle formed by the Tigris and Upper Zab rivers.

In these lands, as also in the plain which stretches across to the west, furrowed by the waters of the Habur and Balih rivers, rainfall permits cultivation without irrigation, although additional and more dependable sources are always desirable to assist in times of drought. Crops, too, are different. The date palm will not ripen, but the milder climate allows a greater variety of fruit trees, and there is evidence that extensive vineyards existed in Assyrian times.

The earliest inhabitants of Assur

The origins of the city of Assur are lost in prehistory. The king lists compiled in later centuries describe the first rulers of Assyria as 'seventeen kings who lived in tents', and this tradition of a nomadic past is doubtless reliable, as far as it applies to the people known later as Assyrians. However, the city after which they are named was inhabited before these nomad sheikhs could have settled there and assumed political power. Long before Sargon of Agade conquered the lands up to the Mediterranean, Assur was the home of a people who seem to have been a northern outpost of Sumerian civilisation. Although no records survive from this date, a building has been excavated in the lowest layers of the site, which bears all the characteristics of an archaic Sumerian temple. Among the finds is a large group of statuary which is virtually indistinguishable from the statues from contemporary Sumer. The fact that similar statuary has recently been found at a shrine in the far north of Mesopotamia shows that there is still much to learn about the extent of Sumerian civilisation.



Old Assyrian Assur

The first date at which it can be confidently said that Assyrians were living at Assur is about 2000 B.C. The city was subject to the kings of the Akkadian empire, and again came under the rule of the Ur empire of the Third Dynasty, when Assur was the residence of a governor. It is not certain when the Assyrians themselves settled. Moreover, it is not clear where they came from, or whether the settlement was a sudden or gradual process. The later Assyrians spoke a dialect of the Akkadian language known as Assyrian, which was quite distinct from the Babylonian dialect of their southern cousins, and, despite the enormous cultural and literary pressure of Babylonian, retained its own peculiar features until the final destruction of the Assyrian Empire.

When written documentation for the history of the city of Assur becomes available, around 1900 B.C., the inhabitants and their rulers are clearly Assyrian in the sense that they spoke this dialect. The picture which is given of these earliest Assyrians is very different from that of later times.

Following a tradition which dated back possibly to before the Akkadian conquest, the people of Assur lived in a small, tightly knit community, based on land holdings in or near the city, relying for their prosperity on trade. Concern for the Assyrian trader is attested in one of the earliest royal inscriptions, where the king of Assur describes how he had opened the markets of Babylonia to the merchants of his city. It seems that the



The slabs which decorated the state apartments of neo-Assyrian royal palaces illustrate the kings' campaigns and hunting parties. The figures are carved in very low relief on the soft limestone.

Left: King Assur-nasir-pal dispatches a wild bull.

Lower left: a horseman of the Sargonid era.

Below: Arab rider and Assyrian infantryman.



kingship of Assur, although hereditary, did not confer on its holder any absolute powers such as were exercised by the kings of Agade.

Moreover, since there is no evidence as to whether the political boundaries extended beyond the immediate surroundings of Assur itself, it is impossible even to be sure if the later capital city of Assyria, Nineveh, was under the same government as Assur before the reign of Shamshi-Adad.

Anatolian traders

Information about these Assyrian merchants does not come from Assur, but from hundreds of miles away, at their trading colony at Kanesh. The business records and letters of these merchants have preserved invaluable information about their trade, presenting a picture of financial life which seems surprisingly modern. The chief items of trade were textiles and metals, especially tin, brought from Assur and sold at a handsome profit in Anatolia. The mode of transport was by donkey caravan, and the traders might take three months over the northern journey, transacting business as they went from town to town across Mesopotamia.

Trade appears to have been in the

hands of large wealthy families, the heads of which directed operations from Assur itself, while junior members organised the caravans, or acted as resident representatives at Kanesh. They looked after the family's business interests, arranged dealings with other merchants and saw to the distribution of goods to the other, smaller trading stations. The colony at Kanesh was vested with authority over the other Assyrian depots, and officials were chosen from among the leading merchants to act as instruments for the enforcement of justice. In a letter addressed to the colony, there is a request from the city of Assur for a contribution by Kanesh to help build a new wall round Assur—a reminder that Assur alone instigated and exercised this trade.

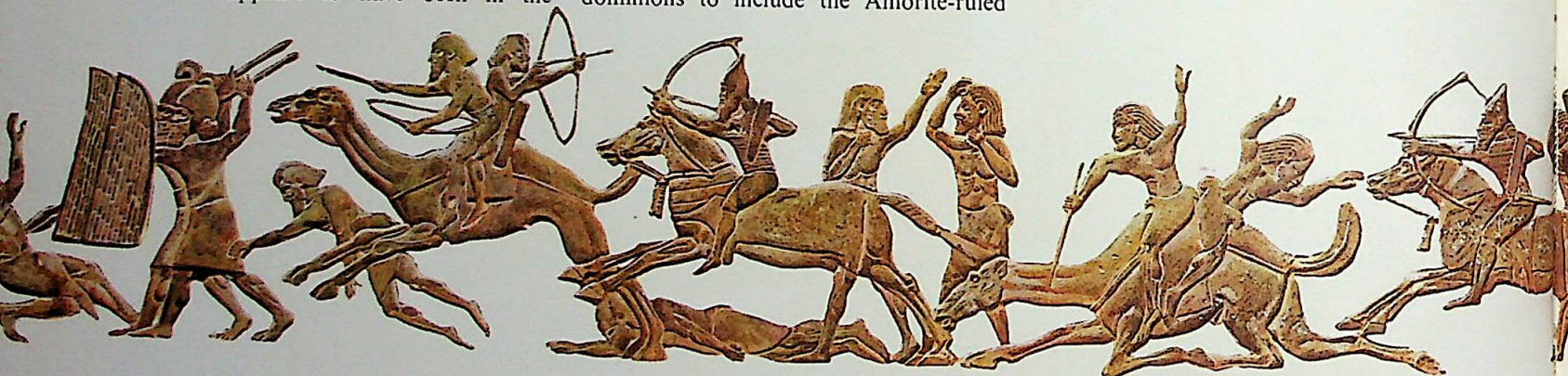
Amorite domination

The same movement which brought the dynasty of Hammurapi to power in Babylon affected the north as well. The Amorite usurper here was Shamshi-Adad, who apparently came from the town of Terqa on the middle Euphrates. After his conquest of the city of Assur itself, he extended his dominions to include the Amorite-ruled

kingdom of Mari, where he installed one of his sons on the throne. He himself turned his attention to the north, and built a new capital in the Habur region.

At about the time of the accession of Hammurapi Shamshi-Adad's possessions stretched over most of northern Mesopotamia, and as such provided a pattern for the subsequent territorial expansion of Assyria. The archive of royal letters discovered at the palace at Mari disclose that Shamshi-Adad himself was in constant touch with Hammurapi in Babylon, and among the many letters referring to military campaigns mention is made of forces of up to 30,000 men. There is even some reason to think that Hammurapi himself at one time recognised Shamshi-Adad's sovereignty. However, the achievements of Shamshi-Adad did not survive him.

Soon after his death Mari was recaptured by the Amorite dynasty which had previously held it. It was not long before the conquering Hammurapi had received the submission of Shamshi-Adad's other son, Ishme-Dagan, who was ruling at Assur, and political circumstances combined to strangle the Anatolian trade.



Above: Assyrian horsemen scatter the camel-riding desert Arabs.

Right: much of Assyria's military success came from its skill in siege warfare and even Shamshi-Adad I used ramps and movable siege-towers to scale enemy fortifications. The illustration shows a curious machine for loosening the bricks of the enemies' defences.

Above right: Assyrian annals frequently mention the impalement of prisoners who had dared oppose the Assyrian kings. Top right: a view of the ruins of Babylon. (Assyrian reliefs. British Museum.)

Assyria as vassal

The submission of Ishme-Dagan to Hammurapi was the prelude to a period of decline in Assyria which lasted for centuries. The dark ages which interrupt the history of the whole of the ancient world of the Near East, began sooner in Assyria than anywhere else and lasted for a longer period. Almost the only source which relates to the history of this period is the list of the kings of Assur, which records an unbroken line of succession from father to son, but gives no clue to their strength or weakness.

For a considerable length of time these kings of Assur were no more than tributary vassals. An extensive archive of tablets from the town of Nuzi, near modern Kerkuk, shows that this region, in the foothills directly to the east of Assur, was part of the dominion of the great kings of Hurrian Mitanni, or Hanigalbat, whose capital lay in northern Mesopotamia; and Assur must have formed part of this dominion. More-





followed by a succession of weak and transitory kings, until a powerful new king restores the country's fortunes and the conquests are repeated. Between 1350 and 625 Assyria extended its control over southwest Asia as had Egypt several centuries earlier, and Babylon and to some extent the Hittites. The three kings who followed Assur-uballit—Adad-nirari I, Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I—brought Assyria's power in the second millennium B.C. to its zenith.

The empire expanded mainly towards the Mediterranean, to the Hurrian kingdom of Hanigalbat, nominally under Hittite protection. However, both Adad-nirari and Shalmaneser were able to march over this territory as far as the Euphrates at Carchemish, and after its second conquest, the area was incorporated into the Assyrian empire, governors were installed in the major cities, and the precedent set by Shamshi-Adad I was realised. There does not appear to have been any determined attempt by Hittites to reverse this state of affairs—a sure sign that

Assyria's military might was internationally recognised. In a letter sent to Tukulti-Ninurta I on his accession, the Hittite king tries to dissuade him from an expedition into the hills to the north, which the Hittite clearly regarded as his own preserve. Yet the stable position to the west enabled Tukulti-Ninurta to ignore this warning, and he spent much time subduing the small Hurrian principalities. Among these was Uruatri, which was to become Assyria's powerful rival of the first millennium, Urartu.

Contact with Babylon

Tukulti-Ninurta's proudest boast was his capture of Babylon, whose sovereignty Assyria seems to have acknowledged at an earlier date. Provoked by the Babylonian king over a border dispute, he defeated him and plundered Babylon itself. Although he ruled in Babylon for some time afterwards, it was not a successful conquest. Native opposition was too well organised, and it may well be that the effort of ad-

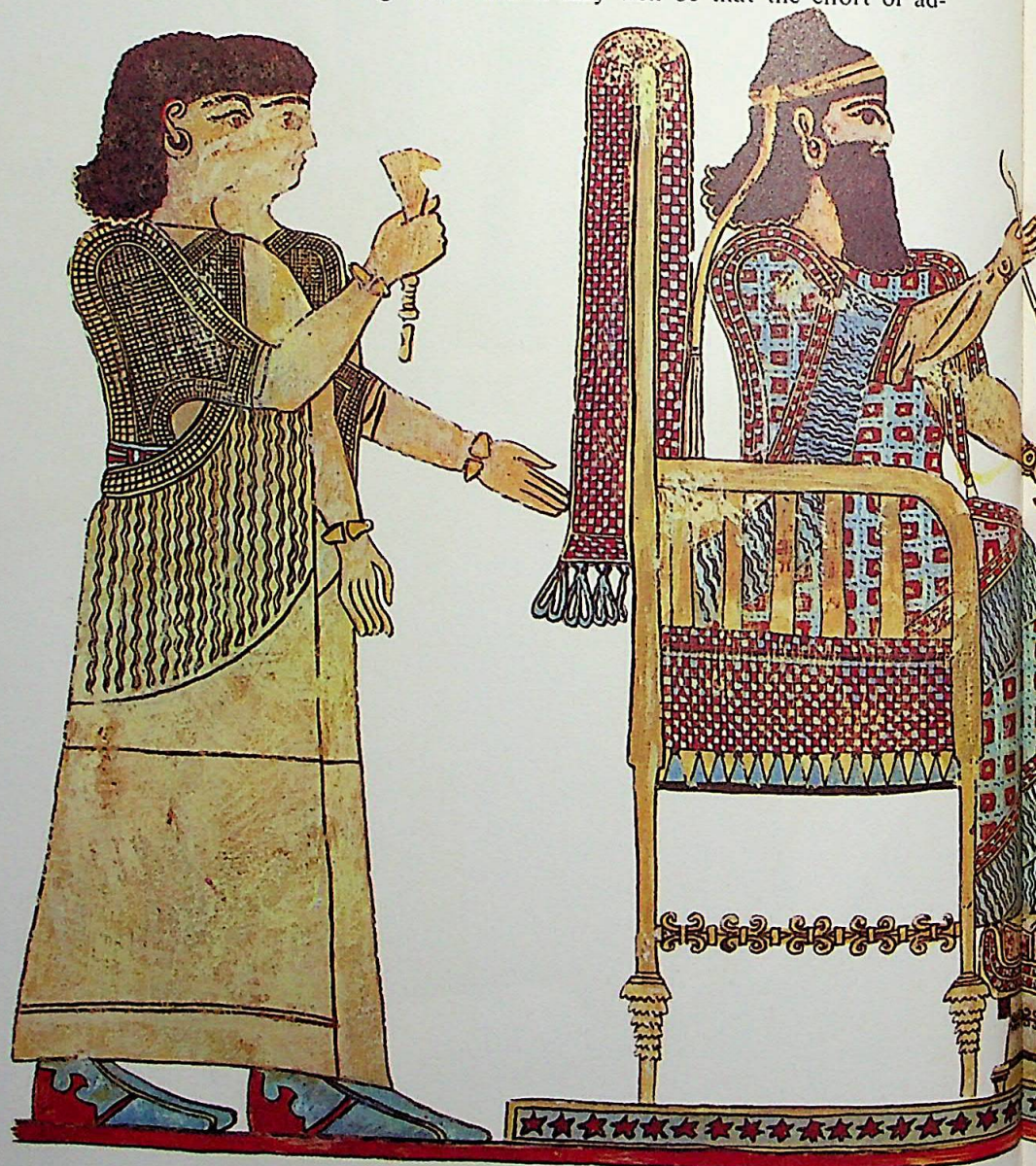
over, when Assur itself reappears in history, its art and language show clearly the influences of a long period of Hurrian overlordship.

Birth of the Assyrian state

Although the events which gave rise to the exchange of correspondence between Hittites, Hurrians and Egyptians affected Assyria only indirectly, two letters from this collection are significant. Assur-uballit, who was king of Assur around 1350 B.C., was sufficiently independent of the earlier Hurrian overlords to write on his own account to the pharaoh. In his second letter he treats the pharaoh as an equal, and refers to himself as 'great king'. This undoubtedly reflects the dwindling power of the Hurrians. They were no longer by this stage one of the great powers, but actually or virtually vassals of the Hittites, who were less concerned to recapture the territories which the Hurrians had lost than to keep them as a buffer state against the rising might of Assyria. It was inevitable that Assyria had to expand its boundaries in areas that had recently been possessions of the Hurrian kings. Since Assur-uballit's two successors campaigned up in the mountains to the north and east, it must be presumed that he himself or his predecessors had regained the lands up the Tigris north of Assur, and especially the Tigris—Great Zab triangle.

Assyrian conquerors

From this time onwards the pattern of Assyrian history until the end, some seven hundred years later, achieves a rather monotonous regularity. Periods of conquest are



ministering Babylonia put too great a strain on the resources of the Assyrians.

Later in Tukulti-Ninurta's reign the Assyrian boundaries began to crumble again, and the murder of Tukulti-Ninurta in his newly built capital across the river from Assur was the prelude to another succession of weak, unstable kings. However, contact with Babylon reinvigorated Assyrian scribal traditions and literature.

The Aramaean threat

Already in the time of Shalmaneser I the desert nomads had been harassing the settled communities again, and for Tiglath-Pileser I they constituted a real menace. Assisted by a firm situation created by his father at home, this king was able in the early years of his reign to reconquer the lands to the north and west, penetrating as far as the Mediterranean. However, his own account of crossing the Euphrates twenty-eight times to inflict punitive raids on the Arameans shows his insecurity; and a

chronicle describes the misery and hunger at the end of his reign when Assyria was overrun by these tribes. It is not known how long this unhappy situation lasted, but when Assyria recovered, the first task of her kings was to crush the resistance of the Aramaean states.

Assyria emerges from the dark ages

The pattern of Assyrian aggression now repeated itself. First came the time of restoration of order and stability within the homeland, and then, under Adad-nirari II (911-889 B.C.), the boundaries were pushed out westwards to enclose those lands which Assyria felt to be its own. The centre of resistance was the Aramaean principdom whose capital was the town of Nisibis in the Anatolian foothills, and once Nisibis had been captured the north Mesopotamian plain as far west as the Habur reverted to Assyrian rule.

Tukulti-Ninurta II, Adad-nirari's suc-

cessor, spent much energy consolidating Assyria's internal position. However, the nomads of the middle Euphrates were still a source of trouble, and he undertook a display of force. After marching south from Assur through desert regions where he and his troops suffered agonies of thirst, and delimiting the border with Babylonia, he crossed the Euphrates, along which he marched until he reached the confluence of the Habur. He then made his way north up this river as far as Nisibis and, after a raid into the mountains beyond, returned to Assyria.

Assur-nasir-pal II

Although, according to his own account, Assur-nasir-pal was a great conqueror, he did not in fact leave Assyria's boundaries greatly expanded. He did not try to impose his rule west of the Habur river, although he marched through the area and compelled its princes to pay tribute. Moreover, his march to the Mediterranean, acknowledged by gifts from distant Phoenician cities, was no



The palace of Til-Barsip, the Aramean city which had been conquered by Shalmaneser III, was decorated by Tiglath-Pileser III with brightly-coloured wall-paintings. Here the king himself is seen in audience, behind him stand beardless eunuchs. The king's throne is an excellent example of Assyrian furniture, which was made of all kinds of precious woods, metals and ivory.

Top left: on their campaigns the Assyrians took captives from many distant countries, some with special skills. To judge from their curious hair style, these musicians may have been foreigners.

more than a propaganda exercise, which also yielded valuable timber from the Amanus forests for his building schemes. In fact many of his campaigns were directed against the hill districts which ringed Assyria to the north and even here he merely consolidated and slightly expanded direct Assyrian rule. In the east and south he did no more than his predecessors, preferring to rely on the lethargy of the Babylonian kingship and the disunity of the mountain tribes.

Innovations at home

However, Assur-nasir-pal was deeply concerned with the country's internal affairs, and he left very eloquent traces of his reign at home. In the first place he saw that the capital city, Assur, was badly situated. Lying far to the south, close to the Babylon-

ian border and well downstream from the corn-growing centre of the country, it was not a convenient base for his campaigns, and so he moved his government to Kalhu, between the Tigris and Upper Zab rivers, where the age-old city of Nineveh also stood. The change showed imagination and insight.

Leaving Assur as religious capital of Assyria, he transformed Kalhu into a secular capital, supplying it with all suitable amenities. In an inscription commemorating the inauguration of his new palace, he tells how he dug a canal from the Upper Zab river, cutting through a hill at its highest point, and called it the Canal of Plenty, Patti-hegalli. He irrigated the meadows of the Tigris, and planted orchards beside it. He planted all kinds of fruits and vines, and established regular offerings for his lord, Assur, and for all the temples of his land. He adorned the palace itself with woods of

various kinds, and to match the new importance of the town he built new temples to house its gods.

Secular and religious buildings alike benefited from an artistic innovation, the sculptured relief. Round the walls of the royal apartments stood slabs of limestone on which were carved—sometimes in superb detail—the exploits of the king in war or in the chase. Although these were only the first of a long series, the simple, vigorous dignity of their scenes was never recaptured by later artists. Great stone lions guarded a temple gateway, and the doorways of the palace, too, were flanked by gigantic guardians in the shape of winged bulls, which have stood as testimony to the grandeur and might of the Assyrian empire.



Further conquests

When Assur-nasir-pal died he left his son, Shalmaneser III, (859–824 B.C.), in command of a territory which now included most of the economically and strategically important land between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Assyria's borders had been pushed back far enough to keep the homeland between Tigris and Upper Zab free from hostile incursions by mountain tribes, and the system of provincial government established by his father allowed Shalmaneser to leave his northern and eastern borders in the capable hands of his provincial governors. Moreover, the experiences of the preceding twenty years had left Assyria's neighbours in no doubt that she was not lightly to be provoked.

Expansion westward

In these circumstances Shalmaneser's chief concern was to gain control of the lucrative trade routes leading from Mesopotamia to Anatolia, and through the Phoenician coastal towns to the Mediterranean. Just as the Aramaean opposition to his predecessors had centred on the city of Nisibis, so now it was a king on the western borders who stubbornly resisted Shalmaneser's expansionist ambitions. Already in the reign of Assur-nasir-pal there was evidence of the presence of a strong, hostile state, which was known to the Assyrians as Bit-Adini. Its

capital was Til Barsip, situated a little to the south of Carchemish on the Euphrates.

On the occasion of Assur-nasir-pal's march to the sea, its ruler, Ahuni, had in fact offered his submission, but there had been no question of conquest by Assyria, and, indeed, Shalmaneser needed three campaigns at the start of his reign to extend his control of the Euphrates. He made the old capital of Bit-Adini the chief town of an Assyrian province, naming it after himself

Hunting was the favourite pastime of the Assyrian kings, and lions their royal quarry. The kings also kept lions in their palace, to be released later for their sport. When a chance offered, they would hunt other animals too, including the elephant and ostrich, and Tiglath-Pileser I even hunted dolphins in the Mediterranean. (Relief, British Museum.)



'Port Shalmaneser'. From this time the land between Euphrates and Tigris was never really out of Assyria's control.

Shalmaneser was not, however, content. To the south and west of the new Assyrian boundary lay a complex of Aramaean states, among them Israel and Judah, which had known a period of great power and prosperity in the preceding centuries when neither Egypt, Assyria nor any Anatolian power had the strength to interfere in their affairs. They would not watch docilely while their country was overrun by another Assyrian conqueror.

It is no longer possible to guess the reasons why Shalmaneser chose to attack the Syrian states. Did he need control of the trade routes, or access to the cedar forests of Lebanon? Or was he simply drawn from one victory to another? In assessing his motives, the enormous strain which even a small campaign imposed on the resources of a country, whether in men, horses or materials, should not be forgotten.

When Shalmaneser turned his attention to Syria and Palestine he met with opposition far stronger than he could have expected. The ruler of Damascus was able to form a coalition which included his own former enemy in the south, Israel, and various neo-Hittite states from as far away as Cilicia. In 853 B.C. Shalmaneser launched a major campaign against Damascus, and at the battle of Qarqar he met a large force to which Ahab of Israel had contributed 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry.

This battle proved indecisive, and it was not until the death of Ben-Hadad of Damascus, who seems to have kept the coalition alive, that Shalmaneser, having received conciliatory gifts from Israel and the Phoenician trading cities, was able to defeat his isolated successor, Hazael, in 851. Damascus itself was not taken, and although he reigned another sixteen years, Shalmaneser gave little attention to the west.

Further troubles

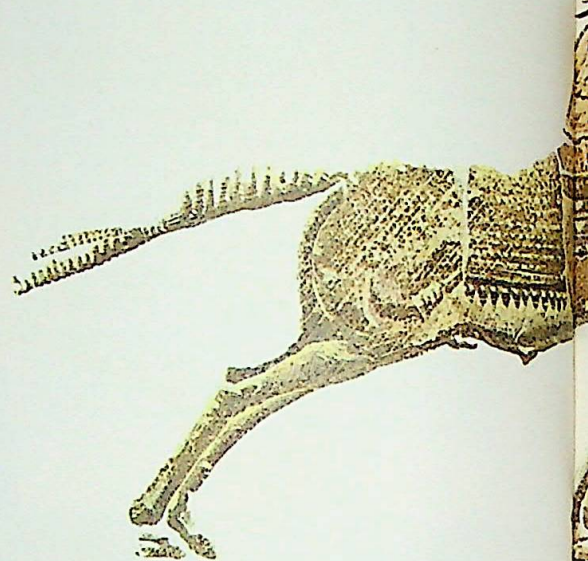
Shalmaneser devoted some time to subduing the kingdoms on the upper reaches of the Euphrates and in the rich, metal-bearing Taurus Mountains. These campaigns may have been designed to check the growth of Assyria's northern rival, the kingdom of Urartu, which, despite three raids into its territory earlier in his reign, was fast becoming a threat, especially since Assyria depended on the northern mountains for its precious supplies of iron and copper. The inactivity of Shalmaneser's later years was partly due to his advancing age. He did, it is true, entrust campaigns, including two against Urartu, to his chief general, but discontent with his capacity to rule must have grown. In his last years he faced a revolt by one of his sons, which his chosen heir, Shamshi-Adad V, was able to suppress only after Shalmaneser had been assassinated.

Adad-nirari III

After Shamshi-Adad V had established his claim to his father's throne, and had reduced the rebel cities that still opposed him, he enjoyed a rather uneventful reign, characterised neither by great conquests nor by significant territorial losses. He must have died quite young, since, on his death, his son and heir, Adad-nirari III was still a minor, and for five years or so the country was under the regency of the king's mother, Sammuramat. Her character was forceful enough for her memory to be preserved until the days of Herodotus (484-428), who knew her under the name of Semiramis.

Adad-nirari displayed great energy and as soon as he came of age he began the usual series of campaigns, designed no doubt chiefly to maintain Assyria's borders as they had been defined by Shalmaneser. He went several times up to the north-east to subdue the tribes of the region of Lake Urmia, and had some success in intimidating the mountain peoples of the Zagros.

His major efforts were, in fact, directed towards the west, where he was able to carry Shalmaneser's conquests one stage further. Beginning in 805 B.C., he marched to the west, and in 801 he achieved the submission of Damascus. This seems to have removed the core of the opposition to him, and he later received tribute and obeisance from the northern Hittite states, from the towns of the Phoenician seaboard, and, in the south, from the Philistines and Israel.



The Assyrians used the horse at first only to draw their chariots and waggons. However, in the first millennium B.C. they began to ride their horses themselves, an art which they may have learnt from the tribes of the Iranian plateau.

Above: Assyrians mounted archers at the gallop (relief from the seventh century B.C. British Museum).

Right: two elaborately decorated riding horses. By artistic convention the head of the second horse is shown in front of the nearer horse's neck. (Mural from Til-Barsip, Syria.)





However, this achievement should not be overestimated. The area west of the Euphrates was never in fact incorporated into Assyria proper until the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, and in spite of the wide area Adad-nirari claims to have reduced, he did not conquer it. Tribute was sent to buy off the Assyrian king and to dissuade him from plundering yet further afield, but at no stage was there any question of annexation. Even Damascus itself, although submissive, was never entered by the Assyrians. It is, moreover, doubtful if any formal treaty was concluded.

Military organisation

Although Adad-nirari's military achievements were less imposing than those of his two great predecessors, he should not be underrated. To administer a territory is a much more difficult undertaking than simply to march victoriously through it. Adad-nirari faced the problem of maintaining well-equipped divisions of Assyrian troops in places far distant from his capital, while retaining sufficiently large numbers at his immediate call for the yearly campaigns.

The military centre of the empire was Kalhu, the modern Nimrud. Under Shalmaneser the yearly succession of expeditions had become so regular, that this king had built an enormous arsenal in one corner of the city, designed both to house the equipment and raw materials, and to serve as a marshalling ground for the army when it set out. Measuring about 400 square yards, this

building, which has recently been excavated, is a powerful reminder of the material organisation required by the Assyrian military machine.

Regional administration

Although the reign of Adad-nirari III is poorly covered by the usual historical annals, clay tablets have preserved for us a picture of how the machinery of administration functioned. On the assimilation of a territory to the empire, the first step was to install in a suitable centre a governor, who acted in all matters as the king's representative. At first, no doubt, his decisions were enforced with military backing, but slowly a civilian administration was built up.

One of the chief assets to Assyria in the acquisition of new territory was the manpower which this put at its disposal, and at the levy of troops for the yearly campaigns each of the governors would have been required to make his contribution. Each province was also expected to supply not only the needs of its own government by taxation, but also to furnish the central treasuries of Kalhu with goods of all kinds—woods, textiles, metals, foodstuffs and animals, especially horses for the army. Thus the governor of the province of Harran, west of the Habur river, was required on one occasion by Adad-nirari to collect six horses in each town or village of his province, and join the regular army at a fixed date for the yearly campaign.

As representative of the king, the governor



The Assyrians have long had a reputation for brutality. When they captured cities their chief opponents were impaled, burnt or simply beheaded, and the remainder often deported or sold as slaves. However, it must be remembered that they were only using the usual methods of the time, and their enemies would have been equally brutal if given the chance.





had other responsibilities apart from military matters. A king was at all times the military, religious and judicial head of the country. He was personally responsible for interceding for his land and people with the national god, Assur. A letter from him to his governor conveys his instructions on how to avert a serious drought:

'The king's word to Mannu-ki-mat-Assur: you and the people of your province are to hold a lamentation ceremony for three days before Adad [the weather god]. Pray; purify your land and your fields; make burnt offerings; and let them hold a purifying ritual wherever you have an enemy. So reconcile Adad. Let them do it at once.'

Tiglath-Pileser III, Assyria's greatest ruler, changed the system of regional government substituting smaller units which reduced the governor's power but enabled him to rule more effectively.

The achievements of Tiglath-Pileser III

As soon as Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) came to the throne he took upon himself the urgent task of restoring the country's fortunes.

The chief menace lay in the growing power of Urartu. While Assyria had suffered dissension at home the kings of Urartu had extended their power by conquest and alliance right down into Syria, thus flanking Assyria to the east and west. In his third year Tiglath-Pileser completely defeated the Urartian coalition in the west, and from that time there was no interference from Urartu while he undertook the task of subjugating Syria. In 732 B.C., having succeeded in isolating Damascus by over-running Israel and Phoenicia to the south, he was able to defeat Syria. Thus it was that the whole of the country as far south as Damascus became absorbed into the Assyrian empire.

Tiglath-Pileser's exploits in the south

Above: prisoners' fate after the battle (Til-Barsip mural).

Far left: captives escorted by an Assyrian soldier, perhaps exiled to a new home in another part of the Assyrian Empire. (Relief, Louvre Museum.)





were equally remarkable. At the time of his accession the nomadic Chaldaean tribes were causing turmoil in Babylonia. He immediately marched south, and, after defeating the trouble-makers, confirmed the reigning king on his throne at Babylon. Some ten years later the death of this king caused another revolt, and after dispossessing the Chaldaean usurper, Tiglath-Pileser himself 'took the hands of the god Bel'—the symbolic action which conferred on him the kingship of Babylon; this was apparently the only way to secure peace and loyalty in Babylonia.

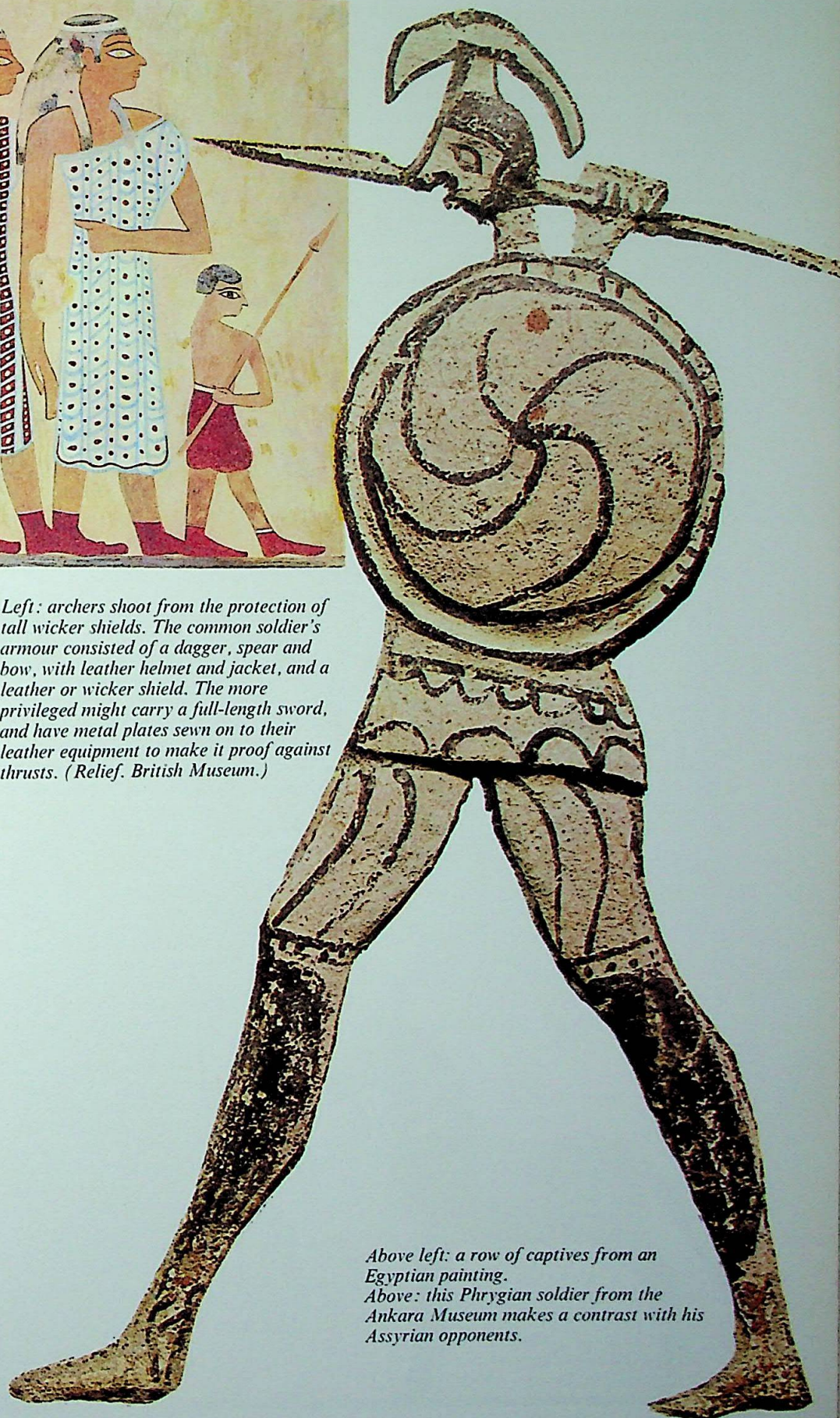
The Sargonid dynasty

In the century which followed the death of Tiglath-Pileser, Assyria awed the world with its apparently invincible might, and astounded it with the speed of its collapse. The four kings—Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Assur-bani-pal—became well known to Egyptians, Jews, Elamites, Persians and even Greeks, as the far-off rulers of the armies which oppressed them.

Assyria and Urartu

In 722 B.C. the capital of Israel, Samaria, was taken by the Assyrian armies after a siege which had been started by Shalmaneser V, Sargon's predecessor. This event allowed Sargon to ignore the west for a while, leaving Judah as the largest unconquered state. Trouble in Babylonia needed his attention, and he also had to deal with unrest among the tribes to the north and east. The events that followed made it clear that this unrest was due to the incitement of Urartu.

Left: archers shoot from the protection of tall wicker shields. The common soldier's armour consisted of a dagger, spear and bow, with leather helmet and jacket, and a leather or wicker shield. The more privileged might carry a full-length sword, and have metal plates sewn on to their leather equipment to make it proof against thrusts. (Relief. British Museum.)



*Above left: a row of captives from an Egyptian painting.
Above: this Phrygian soldier from the Ankara Museum makes a contrast with his Assyrian opponents.*

Throughout the first millennium Assyria was always alert to the presence of a potential rival to the north. When Assyria was weak Urartu might encroach upon Assyria's sphere of influence, as happened before the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III. When Assyria was strong, Urartu was able to concentrate on extending its power elsewhere.

Centred on Lake Van, the dominion of the Urartian kings at times stretched west of the Euphrates, and the tribes of Lake Urmia and beyond generally acknowledged their suzerainty. To the north Urartian power reached well into the Caucasus. Although neither Assyria nor Urartu had designs on the other's homeland, especially since the mountain barrier which separated them made a direct military attack quite impracticable, their interests clashed in the east and the west. In the west Assyria under Shalmaneser V and Sargon had recently annexed two new provinces in the rich, metal-bearing Taurus regions, and in the east each country sought to promote its influence among the tribes of the Iranian plateau, especially the Mannaeans, whose fine horses they coveted.

Sargon's eighth campaign

In the year 714 B.C. Sargon set out north-east-wards for the customary punitive expedition against these Iranian tribes, who had again unseated a king sympathetic to Assyria. He was met by a coalition which included not only the armies of the two strong chieftains who had instigated the tribal revolt, but the king of Urartu, Rusas, and his army. By thus lending his support to the Mannaeans, the Urartian king had made plain his hostility to Sargon's presence in this region. Sargon was unprepared to meet his most powerful opponent, but nonetheless attacked, and won the day. He decided to press home his advantage, making for the Urartian capital at Lake Van, and, although he did not attempt to take it,

Below: horse and groom (Til-Barsip mural).

Right: this unusual hunting scene comes from the reliefs set up by Sargon in his palace at the new capital, Dur-Sharrukin (Fort Sargon), and is one of those carved not in the usual soft, yellowish limestone, but a harder black stone, difficult to work. These reliefs were among the first Assyrian antiquities to be found. They were excavated in the 1840s by a French consul at Mosul. The size and splendour of the site led him to identify it mistakenly with Nineveh.



he ravaged the country round about, and left the land with a firm impression of Assyria's superiority.

Thereafter there was a truce between the two powers. Sargon kept a constant watch on the frontier, and many of the letters sent to him by his officials in the area—of whom his son, Sennacherib, was one—have survived. Spies reported on troop movements and events within Urartu, and a heavy defeat was inflicted on the Urartians by the Cimmerians. The latter were invaders from the Asian steppes, who later pressed into Asia Minor, and were kept out of Assyria only because of prompt action by Sargon in 705 B.C.

The new capital

In the battle which deflected the Cimmerian invaders Sargon was killed. Sennacherib had already seen service on the northern frontiers, organising resistance against Urartu, and the kingship passed smoothly into his hands. Sargon had built an entirely new capital north of Nineveh, with palaces and temples furnished with the most sumptuous decorations the empire could supply. It was not, however, a success, and Sennacherib decided to make Nineveh his capital. From then on Nineveh was the chief city of the empire, and its walls, still visible, have a circumference of nine miles—an 'exceeding great city of three days' journey' as later tradition in the Book of Jonah remembered it.

Assyria and the west

For many years the Euphrates had served as Assyria's western frontier and Tiglath-Pileser's action in incorporating lands beyond in the empire was forced on him by the continuing unrest in the area. Now there was no such obvious boundary to Assyrian aggression. In the south the power of Elam and the Persian Gulf served as a check to Assyrian ambitions. In the north Urartu and the mountain regions of Anatolia formed psychological barriers at least.

However, westwards a chain of more or less vigorous states stretched right down to Egypt, and the conquest of one merely involved Assyria in trouble with the next. The remaining states which lay between Assyria and Egypt faced a terrible dilemma: should they fear more the energy of Assyria or the nearness of Egypt? Hezekiah of Judah, the most powerful of the kings who had not yet submitted to Assyria, chose to ally himself with Egypt. However, as Sennacherib's ministers declared during the siege of Jerusalem by Assyria: '... thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it: even so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust on him'.

Although Sennacherib did not take the

city, the rest of Judah was overrun by the Assyrian army. However, after Sennacherib had turned homewards, Hezekiah chose a more prudent course, and sent an embassy to offer his submission. With the exception of the city of Tyre, secure in its island fortress, the whole of western Asia now acknowledged the supremacy of Assyria.

The Assyrian invasion of Egypt

This, however, did not mean peace. There was still a strong power, Egypt, inciting unrest and disobedience, and after King Esarhaddon had twice come west to suppress revolts, he bypassed the city of Tyre which had intrigued with Egypt, and made straight for the Nile itself. After victories in the Delta region in 674–673 B.C., he gathered his forces for a final assault. In 671 he was able to defeat the pharaoh completely and occupy the city of Memphis. While on a further campaign to deal with the remainder of Upper Egypt, Esarhaddon fell sick and died, thus bringing the expedition to an end.

This was the time of Assyria's greatest expansion. The two great centres of civilisation, Babylon and Egypt, were under its control, and all the nations of the world—even the Greeks—believed Assyria to be invincible. However, Egypt was a long way from Assyria, and, although Assur-bani-pal was able to reassert his authority in Egypt, he thought it easier to appoint local princes.

He found it necessary to undertake campaigns against Egypt in 667 and 663 B.C., but he made no attempt to incorporate Egypt in the empire. When, some time after 658 the pharaoh Psammetichus expelled the Assyrian garrisons from Egypt, Assur-bani-pal does not seem to have attempted to restore his position. It is likely that the vast distance separating the two countries, the difficulty of imposing Assyrian rule on a country with its own civilisation and his preoccupations elsewhere, convinced him that Egypt was not worth the trouble.

The Assyrian kings in Babylon

When Tiglath-Pileser took the hands of Bel, Assyria had finally allowed itself to be drawn into politics with its southern neighbour. This was to prove a tiresome problem. Although it had not been too difficult to reduce Chaldean opposition to Assyria at first, the activities of one Chaldaean chief, Marduk-apla-iddina, (the Merodach-Baladan of the Bible), changed the situation.

The latter managed to unite a number of the tribes under his authority, and, on the death of Shalmaneser V while campaigning in the west, he entered Babylon and claimed the kingship for himself. Sargon came south the next year to punish him, but was met by a strong army from Merodach-Baladan's eastern ally, Elam, which halted his advance





so effectively that Sargon was content to leave Babylonia under its rebel king until a more opportune moment. This came in 710 B.C., when Sargon, meeting no serious opposition, magnanimously left Merodach-Baladan as chief of his own tribe and made himself king of Babylon.

His generous treatment of the enemy proved advantageous, and no further trouble came from Babylonia until his death. His successor, Sennacherib, kept military control of Babylonia, but did not take the hands of Bel, and, therefore, in theory had no kingship of Babylon. This was claimed in 703 B.C. by Merodach-Baladan, who had now managed to secure the support of the Elamites, and even of Hezekiah of Judah.

However, Sennacherib was able to defeat him easily, and installed first a Babylonian puppet-king, and then one of his own sons, on the throne of Babylon. These attempts, too, foundered on the combined hostility of Elam and the Chaldaean tribes,

and in 689 B.C., when Babylon fell after a long siege, Sennacherib's patience was exhausted, and he sacked the capital, carrying off the chief god, Bel, to Assyria. He himself assumed the title of king of Sumer and Akkad, and in his last years entrusted the government of the southern provinces to his son, Esarhaddon, whom he had designated as his successor. In 681 B.C. Esarhaddon succeeded to the throne after foiling the conspirators who had killed his father.



Esarhaddon and Assur-bani-pal

Although there were no major troubles in Babylonia during his reign, the experiences of the preceding two reigns left Esarhaddon well aware of the need for a satisfactory settlement there, and one which was compatible with Babylonian pride. He took very great care to ensure that after his death the empire would be well administered. His eldest son, Shamash-shum-ukin, was given the kingship of Babylon, while Assyria—and therefore the overlordship of Babylon—was assigned to Assur-bani-pal. The succession was determined as he wished, but, although the brothers maintained outwardly friendly relations, they finally quarrelled.

About fifteen years after Esarhaddon's death Shamash-shum-ukin began to intrigue with Assyria's enemies—with Elam, the Chaldaeans and other nomads, with Palestine and even with Egypt. However,



In the course of their campaigns the Assyrian kings crossed all kinds of terrain, which they illustrated in their reliefs. Above left: Fugitives swimming away from the Assyrians to the shelter of an island fort. (Relief. British Museum.) Above: Sennacherib campaigned in the southern marshes against the Chaldaean tribes. Here a group crouches on one of their reed-boats. (Relief. British Museum.) Left: a man in a fish-skin, probably a priest, holding a curious object with which he is apparently anointing a deity (not shown). From a water-tank from the temple of the god Assur at Assur. (Berlin Museum.)



although he offered the most stubborn resistance Assyria had encountered, in 648 B.C. Assur-bani-pal's troops entered the city of Babylon which had succumbed to famine after a two-year siege. Shamash-shum-ukin avoided capture by throwing himself into the flames of his burning palace. Assur-bani-pal took the throne and held it unchallenged until his death in 627 B.C.

Assur-bani-pal's library

Assur-bani-pal's library at Nineveh was a lasting monument. He himself recorded how, as crown prince, he learnt besides horse-riding and warfare, to read and write Akkadian and Sumerian in the cuneiform script, and even to solve mathematical problems. We must be grateful to him for his academic interests, because the library he collected forms the basis of modern knowledge of Mesopotamian science and literature. As commonly in libraries, the works of reference are the bulkiest.

Following the Babylonians here, as in all branches of literature, the Assyrian scribes made huge compilations of omens, in which any event which might seem significant—for example, the behaviour of an animal—





was given its interpretation by the priests. However, apart from this pseudo-science, much of value was recorded. In mathematics, astronomy and chemistry the Babylonians and Assyrians had made many discoveries since Sumerian times, and many of the texts of Assur-bani-pal's library bear witness to continued interest in these subjects.

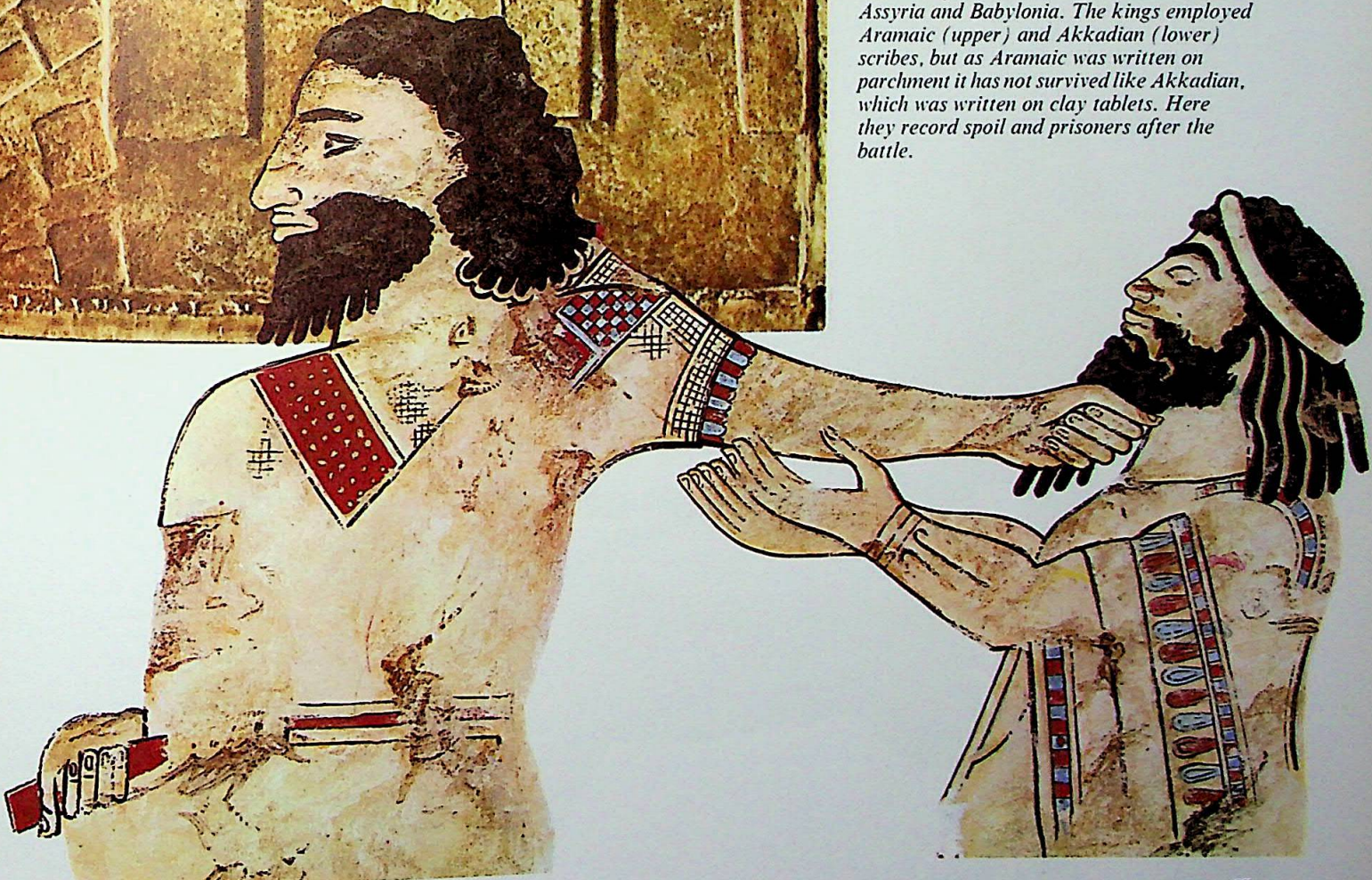
Literary texts

The literary texts, which were copied by Assur-bani-pal's scribes, were of equal importance. These show a much greater dependence on the Sumerian traditions preserved by the Kassite scribes of Babylon. The epic of Gilgamesh, the most famous work of Akkadian literature, is based on a number of the shorter Sumerian tales of Gilgamesh. The story of the flood, worked into the same Akkadian epic, is derived

Below: prisoner and captor. (Til-Barsip mural).

Left: a vivid siege scene from a relief of Assur-nasir-pal II.

Far left: two scribes. During the first millennium Aramaic, the language of the Aramaeans and related to Akkadian, was as much spoken as the native dialects in Assyria and Babylonia. The kings employed Aramaic (upper) and Akkadian (lower) scribes, but as Aramaic was written on parchment it has not survived like Akkadian, which was written on clay tablets. Here they record spoil and prisoners after the battle.



from the Sumerian original, entirely unconnected with Gilgamesh. Hymns, descriptions of rituals, prayers and incantations, lists of words, grammatical and legal compilations—all in constant use—owed their origin and their form to Sumerian, although written in Akkadian. Even the proverbs were derived not from the living language of contemporary Babylon or Assyria, but from Sumerian originals of more than a thousand years before. This parallels the use of Latin in the Middle Ages, when the debt extended far beyond the mere use of Latin as a scholarly language. Legends, history and, indeed, a whole way of thought were inherited from the earlier civilisation.

The fall of Assyria

Records are lacking for the end of Assurbani-pal's reign, and so it is impossible to judge how far Assyria's might had declined before his death. However, from that time, it faced revolt and aggression on all sides, and even the good generalship of its kings did not suffice to save it from new dangers. In 612 B.C. the king in Babylonia, Nabopolassar, and his ally, the Mede, Cyaxares, were able to enlist the support of the Scythian army which had previously fought against them, and to launch their final attack on Nineveh. After three attempts the great capital of Assyria fell to its besiegers, and the 'burden of Nineveh' is described in the

Old Testament by the prophet Nahum:

'Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: Thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them. There is no healing of thy bruises; thy wound is grievous: All that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: For upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?'

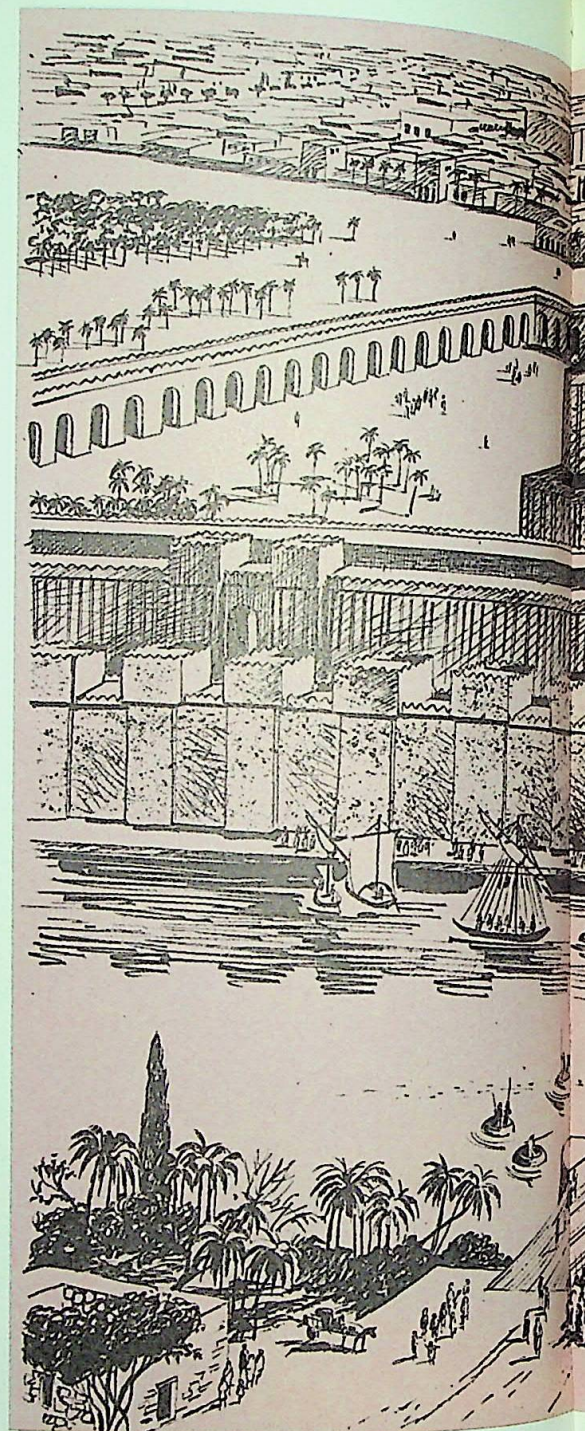
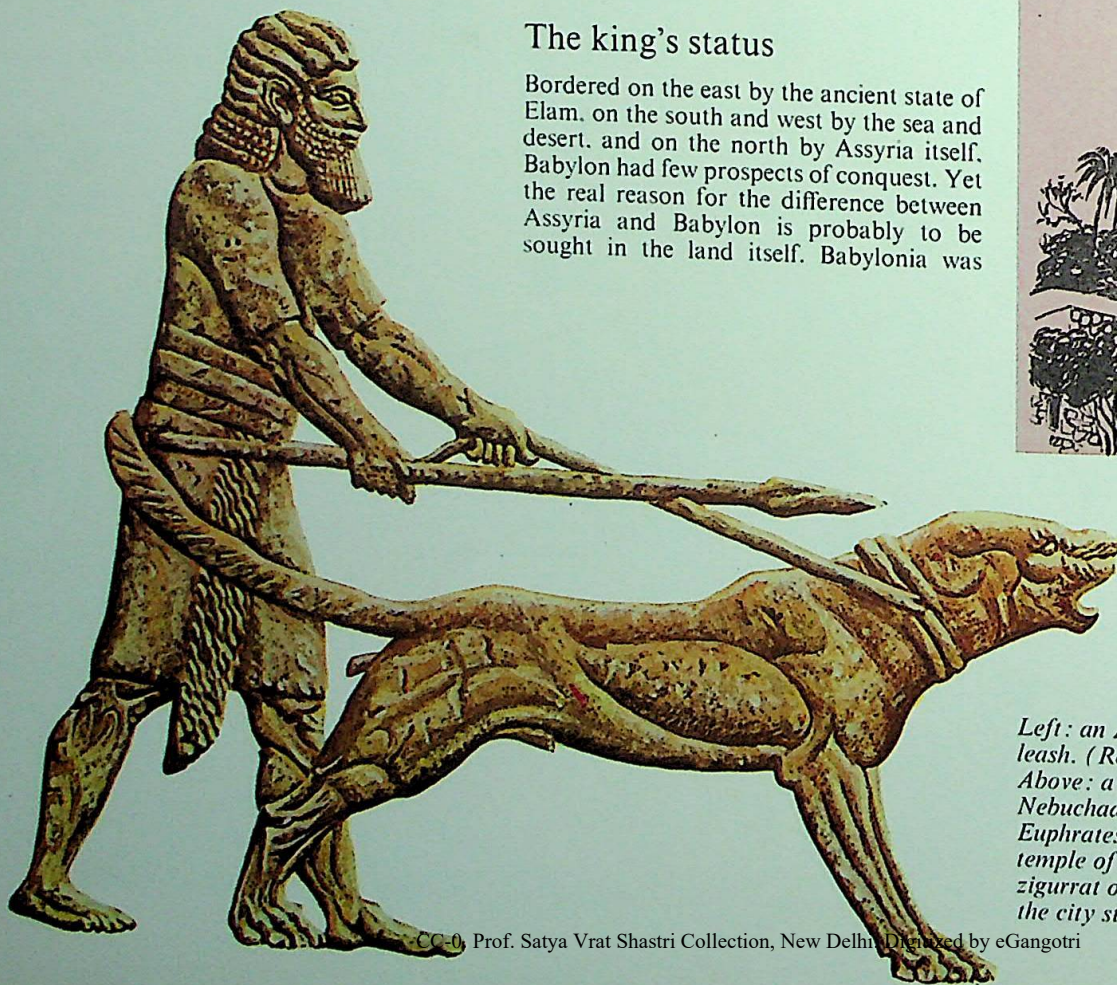
Events in Babylon

The fall of Nineveh was irrevocable. A remnant of the Assyrian empire held out for a time in the western city of Harran, but it was a hopeless cause. From now on events originated not in Assyria but in Babylonia, and Mesopotamia soon lost its special place in history. After the end of the First Dynasty power had passed to the Kassites, a people of mountain origin, who adopted the civilisation of their subjects, and consciously fostered their ancient scribal traditions.

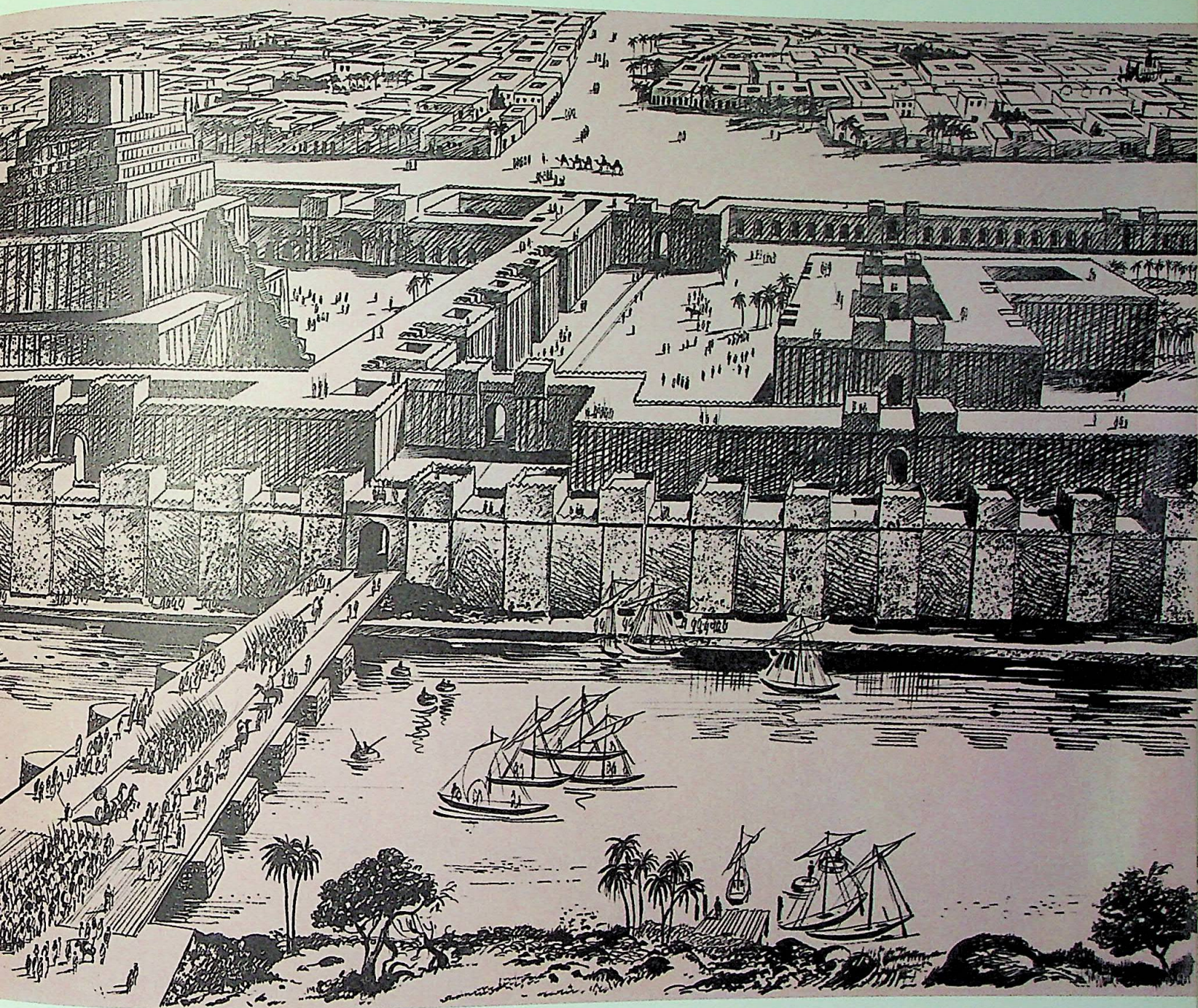
However, neither they nor any of the succeeding short-lived dynasties were the equal of Assyria in military strength. Although there were times in the second millennium B.C. when Assyria acknowledged the overlordship of Babylon, and although the two countries were in constant dispute over some of their border towns, Babylon seems always to have rejected the habit of military conquest which was so natural to Assyria.

The king's status

Bordered on the east by the ancient state of Elam, on the south and west by the sea and desert, and on the north by Assyria itself, Babylon had few prospects of conquest. Yet the real reason for the difference between Assyria and Babylon is probably to be sought in the land itself. Babylonia was



Left: an Assyrian holds a hunting dog on a leash. (Relief, British Museum.) Above: a reconstruction of the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar. We look across the Euphrates with its bridge to the great temple of Marduk or Bel (right), with its ziggurat on the left. Beyond, the houses of the city stretch as far as the eye can see.



immensely fertile. Long established industries together with a highly developed commercial life greatly increased the country's prosperity. The power of the kings was not so great as in Assyria, and war inevitably meant increased trade disruption.

The guardians of ancient temples, possessing great land holdings, were just as anxious as influential merchant families to see that their prosperous activities were not curtailed by war. Although the kingship in Babylon changed hands frequently, the population as a whole was not concerned. When Babylon was under the Assyrian kings, the kingship was frequently wrested from them by local usurpers, of whom the most active were the Chaldaeans.

Nabopolassar

When the Aramaeans, who were related to the Chaldaeans, pushed into northern Mesopotamia, the Chaldaeans themselves occupied the marshes in the south of Babylonia. They did not readily co-operate, and were hence both weak and difficult to control. They had no vested interest in peace, like the settled Babylonians further north, and they naturally took advantage of any disturbances to promote their own causes.

The death of Assur-bani-pal provided just such an opportunity, and, after a struggle with his successors, which lasted several years, a Chaldaean chief called Nabopolassar was able to claim the kingship

of Babylon and win the allegiance of the country. However not content with that, he assisted the Medes in the capture of Nineveh in 612 B.C., and in 605 his son, Nebuchadnezzar, was able to rout the Egyptian army at Carchemish, thus destroying the last hopes of Assyria, with whom Egypt was in league. The Egyptians were chased by Nebuchadnezzar right down to their border, and he might well have followed them further, but for the news of his father's death. Hastening back to Babylon, he secured the throne, to which he had shown himself a worthy successor, and left his new conquests, Syria and Palestine, subdued.



The political scene

Nebuchadnezzar was in a remarkable position. Assyria had been effectively removed from the scene, Egypt was constrained within its borders and he was allied with the rising power of the Medes in the east. They held the lands to the north, and as time went on they advanced across the mountainous districts of Asia Minor to confront the Lydians, who were masters in the west, at the Halys river. There, after inconclusive fighting, the boundary was fixed, with the help of Babylonian arbitration, and each was now in a position to turn their efforts elsewhere.

Nebuchadnezzar and Judah

With his northern and eastern borders guarded by the Median alliance, Nebuchadnezzar was free to deal with the south-west. Once more Judah, with encouragement from Egypt, defied the distant king in Mesopotamia. However, unlike Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar was in a position to punish rebels. In 597 Jerusalem was taken, its king Jehoiachin and some of its inhabitants deported to Babylonia, and a new king, Zedekiah, installed to maintain a Babylonian policy. However, national feeling was too much for him, and he too rebelled, only to bring down on his city a devastation

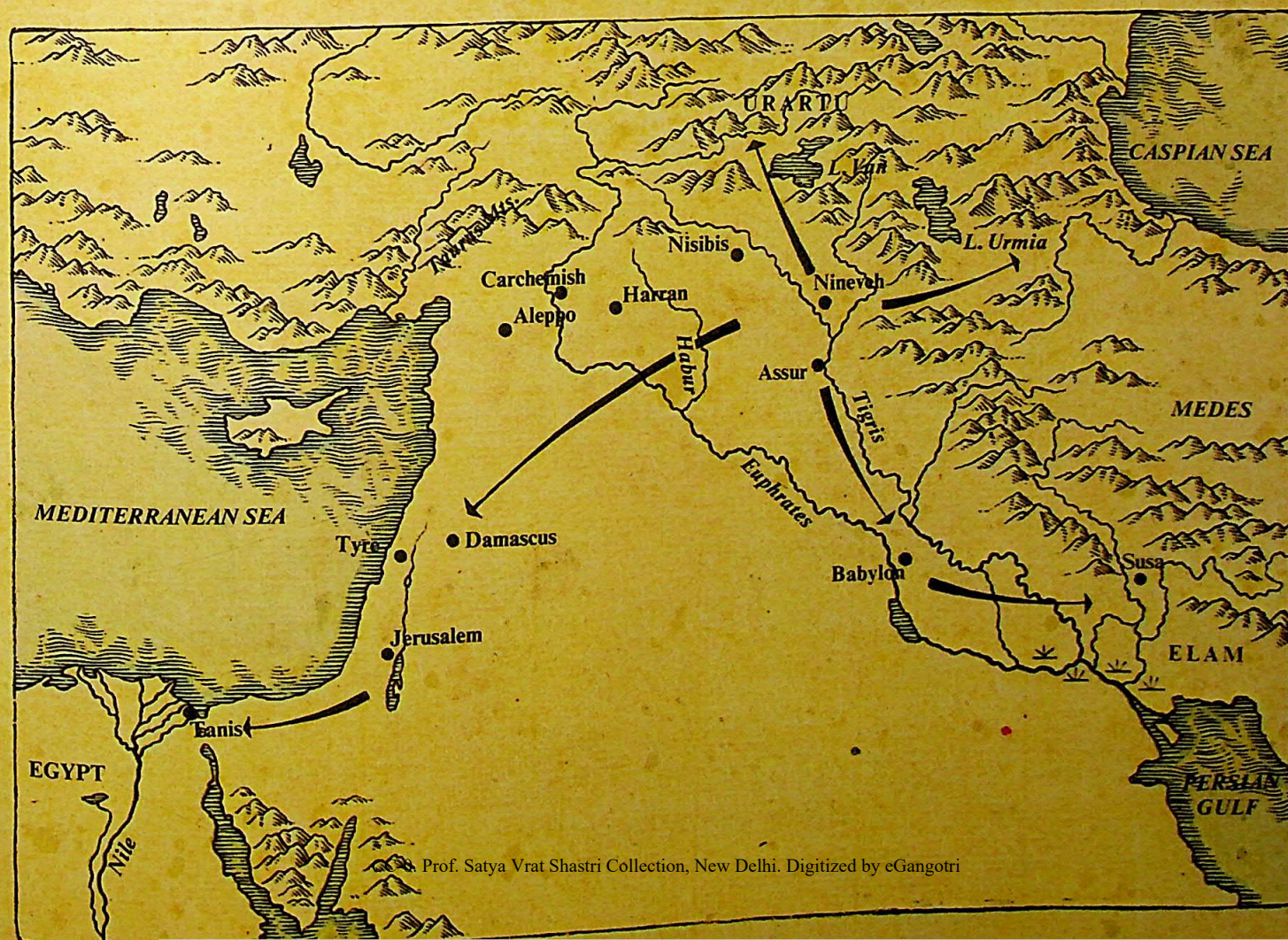
Above left: A woman's head, six inches high and made of Phoenician ivory, once used to decorate a piece of furniture. (Iraq Museum, Baghdad.)

Above: A basalt statue of King Shalmaneser III from Ashur. (Archaeological Museum, Istanbul.)

Right: The Assyrian kings were supreme in every corner of this section of the Near East except one—Cyprus. Midas the Phrygian, Gyges the Lydian, Egypt, the Arabian tribes, and Susa, the ancient capital of Elam, were all subject or submissive. Only in the north could the mountain kings of Urartu boast their independence.

ASSYRIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

Assyrian rulers	Domestic and foreign history	Culture	Neighbouring countries	Assyria and Babylon	Anatolia and Palestine	Iran	Egypt
1200	Invasion of the peoples of the sea	Assur capital	Dorian invasion of Greece	700	Sennacherib Esarhaddon Assur-bani-pal Revolt of Babylon	Dejoces Phraortes Cyrus I, king of Anshan	Napatan rule Capture of Memphis Sack of Thebes
Assur-dan I	Assyrian incursions into Babylonia		Rameses III		Gyges, king of Lydia Cimmerian invasions		
1100	Assyria attacked on all sides by Aramaeans and Gutians	Destruction of the first temples and palaces	Migration of Medes and Persians into Iran End of Middle Kingdom in Egypt Daniel	650	Capture of Babylon Death of Assur-bani-pal Nabopolassar king of Babylon Destruction of Nineveh Nebuchadnezzar	Lydians invent coinage Cyaxares king of the Medes Alliance of Medes and Babylonians	Saite revival Psammetichus I expels the Assyrians
Tiglath-Pileser		Palaces and bas-reliefs at Tell Halaf	Solomon		Jeremiah		Necho II
1000			Medes and Persians advance to Zagros	600	Brilliant Neo-Babylonian Empire	Siege of Jerusalem Ezekiel	
900	Adad-nirari II Tukulti-Ninurta II Assur-nasir-pal II Shalmaneser III	Assyria the centre of an empire	Nineveh and Kalhu capitals Babylonian cults spread into Assyria		Nabonidus	Destruction of Jerusalem Croesus king of Lydia Cyrus annexes Lydia	Astyages Apries Amasis
800	Shamshi-Adad V Adad-Nirari III Semiramis (regent) Tiglath-Pileser III Sargon II	Further Assyrian conquests	Kingdom of Phrygia Kingdom of Lydia	550	Cyrus takes Babylon	Cyrus II deposes Astyages Persian Empire	Height of Saite power
700	Sennacherib Esarhaddon Assur-bani-pal	Invasion of Egypt Sack of Babylon Assyria devastated by the Scythians Destruction of Nineveh	Nineveh again capital Flourishing of sculpture	500	Babylon annexed to Persian Empire	End of Babylonian captivity Cambyes Death of Cambyes Darius I	Psammetichus III Cambyes conquers Egypt
600		Assur-bani-pal's library	Cyaxares king of the Medes and Persians				



which was meant to be as final as that of Nineveh. In 586 B.C. city and temple were sacked and the population was carried off into exile in Babylonia.

Nebuchadnezzar's method of subjugation already had been tried by the Assyrians. They had found that if the native population were uprooted and replanted elsewhere, it lost much of the will to assert its independence. On the other hand, those brought in to replace them knew, in these strange surroundings, that their only chance of survival lay in obedience to the great king. It was not necessarily an inhuman process. From the correspondence of the Assyrian kings it can be seen that they were anxious to see their deportees well fed and clothed. The Jewish colonies in Babylonia flourished and ration lists found at Babylon show that King Jehoiachin, at least, was accorded dignified treatment.

The city of Babylon

Like the Assyrian kings, Nebuchadnezzar was not only a conqueror but a tireless builder. Although the Assyrian kings had not neglected the needs of Babylon, its destruction under Shamash-shum-ukin and the continual fighting over the city which had preceded Nabopolassar's final victory can hardly have left it in a state worthy of the capital of so great an empire. Nabopolassar himself began building schemes, but undoubtedly the most spectacular works were undertaken by his son. Nebuchadnezzar saw to it that Babylon was remembered in later years as the greatest city in the world.

About 100 years after him the Greek traveller and historian, Herodotus, saw the city under its Persian monarchs, and his comment: '... it is more splendid than any other city known to us', was an acknowledgment of Nebuchadnezzar's achievements.

Not only the enigmatic 'hanging gardens', considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, but numerous temples, palaces, roads, walls, gates and even a bridge across the Euphrates, which ran through the city, were among the works of this great king. The most spectacular of these monuments to survive is the Ishtar Gate, through which the Processional Way crosses the great walls. Designed in glazed bricks, yellow and white lions and dragons march against a blue background along the road leading to the massive, crenellated gate-towers, laid on foundations as deep as their walls are high.

Herodotus describes in great detail this seemingly impregnable wall, and other marvels like the bridge and the great temple of Marduk, or Bel, with its zigurrat. This stepped, pyramid-like structure—which must be the origin of the 'tower of Babel'—copied the Sumerian architecture of the Third Dynasty of Ur. It serves as another reminder that Nebuchadnezzar and

his dynasty, who even used the archaic Sumerian script, were deeply conscious of their position as restorers of the glory of ancient Babylon and Sumer.

Nebuchadnezzar's successors were a disappointment. His own son, Amel-Marduk (562–560 B.C.) was weak, and was murdered in a palace conspiracy, being replaced by his brother-in-law, Nergal-shar-usur (560–556 B.C.). The latter may have been more capable—he led an expedition to deal with a troublesome king as far away as Seleucia, west of Cilicia in Turkey—but he did not reign much longer. His son, Labashi-Marduk, was murdered within a year of his accession, his throne passing to the last ruler of independent Babylon, Nabu-naid, generally known as Nabonidus.

Nabonidus

Nabonidus is one of the most enigmatic figures of history. He was deeply religious and already an old man when he acceded, and his actions may well have given rise to the legends of madness which have been told of Nebuchadnezzar. In the first year of his reign he was commanded in a dream to rebuild the temple of the moon-god, Sin, at Harran, which had been left desolate since the city's capture by the Medes at the time of the final destruction of Assyria. Nabonidus, who was clearly no great warrior, objected that the Medes still held the city, but was assured that they and their allies were doomed. In fact, Nabonidus records: 'when the third year came, Marduk made his young servant, Cyrus, king of Anshan, rise against them, and he scattered the numerous Medes with his small army and captured Astyages, king of the Medes, and brought him in fetters into his land'.

Nabonidus fulfilled the task set him, but his attentions to the god Sin earned him the disfavour of the all-powerful priests of Marduk in Babylon, and later he himself stated that the gods no longer wished him to stay in the city, which was suffering plague and famine during his presence. He therefore retired to the city of Tema in central Arabia—always a stronghold of the worship of the moon-god—and, leaving his son, Belshazzar, as his regent, lived there peacefully for ten years.

Cyrus

While Nabonidus was in retirement, important changes took place in the Near East. Cyrus, the founder of the Persian empire, had inherited the Median possessions, and lost no time in enlarging them. Most ominously, the kingdom of Lydia, which had successfully defied the Medes, crumbled before him. In 547 B.C. he pursued them to the outskirts of their capital, Sardis, and after a siege, captured the city and their king, Croesus. With Asia Minor at his feet,

and the sea his boundary in the west, he turned his attention to Babylon, and the old alliance between Babylon and Persia was now in jeopardy.

The fall of Babylon

Cyrus' ambition was unbounded, and, employing the tactics he had used against the Medians and Lydians, he struck right at the heart of Babylonia. In 539 B.C., when Nabonidus had returned to Babylon, Cyrus' army scattered a force sent to block its approach, and he met no further opposition to his advance. The bloodless capture of the city was accomplished so easily that historians are at a loss to explain it. There may be some truth in Herodotus' story that Cyrus diverted the Euphrates, allowing his troops to enter surreptitiously along the river bed, but this is not a complete explanation.

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that treachery had been used. After the conquest Cyrus did his best to blacken the memory of Nabonidus and to portray himself as a liberator, and it may be that priests within the city who resented the religious beliefs of Nabonidus arranged to betray the city. However, the events leave no doubt that the vigour of the neo-Babylonian empire had ebbed steadily since Nebuchadnezzar's death.

The Persian Empire was far greater than any previous one, and united countries whose names were strange to one another. In the west, the Persians followed the Assyrian example by ruling Egypt, and their empire stretched as far to the east of Babylon as to the west. Babylon itself still flourished. In Herodotus' day it supplied a third of the corn for the whole empire, and the Persian kings fostered Babylon's ancient traditions. However, the political importance of Mesopotamia had declined, and world history moved across the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, with little regard for their earlier glories.

Between 490 and 478 B.C. the Greeks weathered the storm of the Persian invasions. One of the decisive events of their history, and indeed of the Western world, for the Persians it was but a minor set-back; they had merely wanted to punish the insolent petty states which had dared to incite rebellion among their cities in western Anatolia. More serious for them was the revolt in Egypt, a potential source of great wealth. They could not, however, foresee Greece's future role.

Alexander and his successors

In 334 when Alexander the Great of Macedon defied the Persian Empire in the west—in lands where Greeks had dwelt long before Cyrus—he could not have known how far his action would take him. Two decisive battles, one in Syria, and one in the ancient Assyrian homeland, were enough to destroy

completely the resistance of the Persian Empire. As we shall see in volume two of the *Hamlyn History of the World*, Alexander's conquests did not vanish with his mysterious death at Babylon. The Greeks maintained their hold on Babylon during the Seleucid dynasty founded by one of Alexander's generals. More important than conquest was cultural victory. The Greeks brought with them their own philosophy, science and literature, so that Babylon even lost its cherished claims to be the centre of learning of the ancient world.

The Seleucid dynasty lasted no longer than

the Persian, and its empire was divided between the Romans and the Parthians. Rome was soon milking Asia Minor and Syria of their wealth, but was prevented from advancing further into Armenia and Persia by the vigorous opposition of the Parthian kings, and where Romans and Parthians met, along the Euphrates, the land was devastated by continual battles.

At Carrhae (Harran), the Parthians inflicted a crushing defeat on a Roman army. Although the Romans later managed to push their border eastwards into the lands of ancient Assyria, Parthia, with its Persian

heritage, was an enemy which was always held in respect by Rome and never fell victim to Roman rapacity.

In time Parthians made way for Sassanians, who were opponents of the Byzantine emperors, and when they too succumbed to the might of Islam and the Abbasid caliphate made its capital at Baghdad, near ancient Babylon, the memories of Mesopotamia's earlier glories had faded beyond recall. Only in the nineteenth century were they revived by pioneering archaeologists.

The legacy

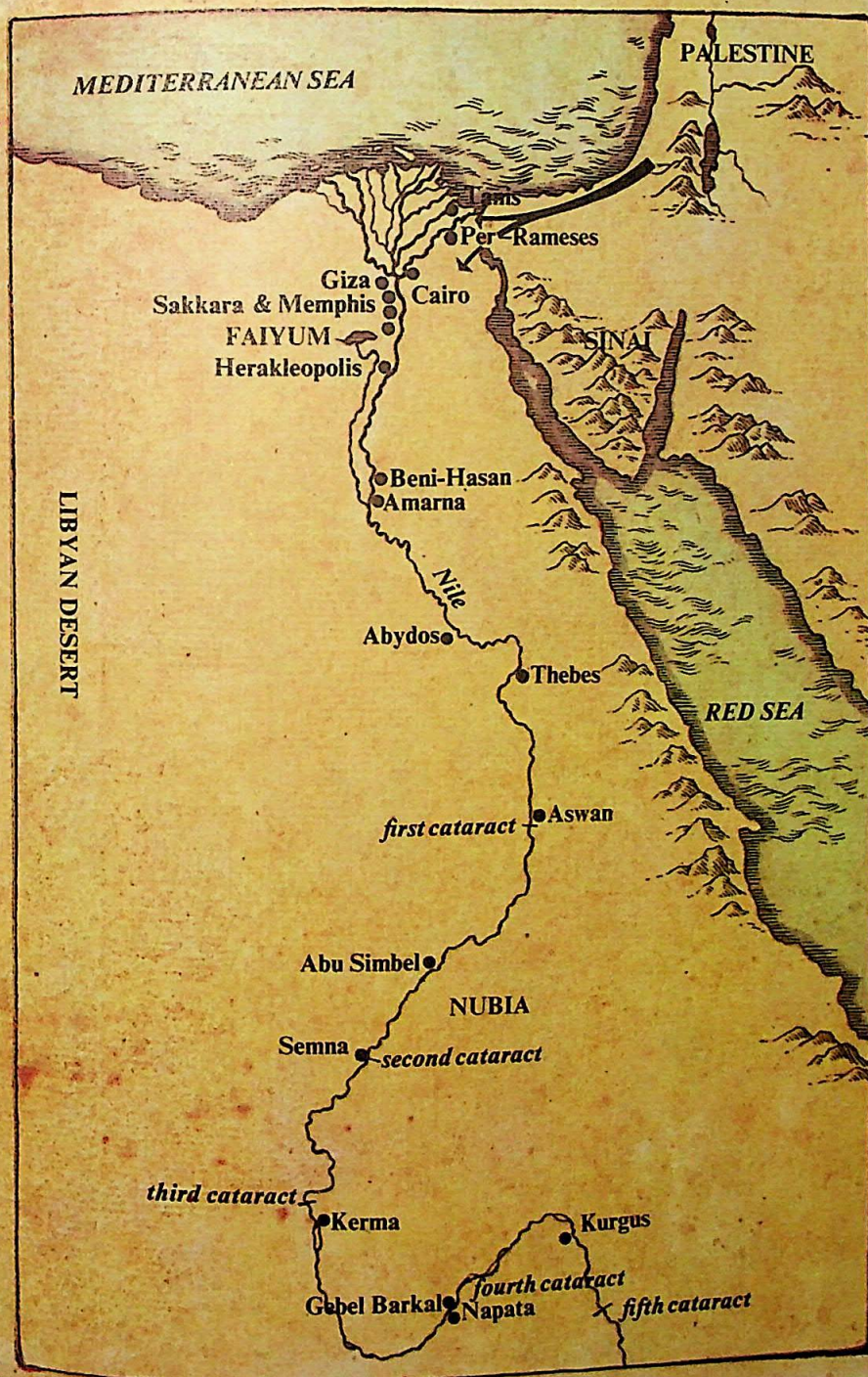
For many years Assyrians and Babylonians alike had been no more than the enemies of Israel mentioned in the Bible. However, modern discoveries have enabled a whole new civilisation to be reconstructed, to which the Bible gives no clue, although the world of the Old Testament was itself a small part of this civilisation. During more than two thousand years the rise and fall of successive empires can be followed. Throughout this period Mesopotamia is the centre of all learning, the source of all wealth and the ruler of the world.

Western civilisation has two chief links with the ancient Near East: Greece and the Bible. It can be readily seen how Mesopotamia impinged on the Biblical world, and the discovery of a fragment of the Epic of Gilgamesh in the Palestinian city of Megiddo sheds some light on the channels by which the flood stories of ancient Sumer reached the author of the Book of Genesis. The influence on Greece is less tangible. In the second millennium B.C., throughout the Near East—lands with which the Mycenaean Greeks traded—Akkadian was the language of diplomacy.

It was inevitable that culture and customs as well as language would permeate these lands. If Egyptian influence is more evident, other parts of the Near East also played their part in the genesis of Greece. Without the knowledge of astronomy, chemistry and mathematics which were the heritage of Egypt and Babylon, Greek philosophy would be unrecognisable. Moreover, Greek art in its formative stages was also subject to influences from the east.

However, perhaps the most valuable single asset a knowledge of Mesopotamia can offer is to provide a backcloth against which the original achievements of the Greeks stand out in greater relief than ever.

Ancient Egypt and adjacent lands, showing the places mentioned in the text. It is important to realise that whereas the modern state of Egypt covers some 400,000 square miles of north-east Africa, to the peoples of the Ancient World Egypt was merely the cultivated lands of the Nile valley and delta.





The Civilisation of Egypt

The first stirrings in the Nile delta; the invention of hieroglyphics; the divine kingship of Pharaohs; the worship of the sun; the flourishing civilisation of the Middle Kingdom; Theban rulers expel the Hyksos; Egypt expands north to Palestine and south to Nubia; the religious revolution of Akhenaten; the empire declines in the twentieth dynasty; Egypt invaded by the Assyrians and the Persians.

The natural setting

Egypt's civilisation developed in one of the largest arid desert areas in the world, larger than the whole of Europe. It was possible only because of the River Nile, which crosses an almost rainless desert from south to north carrying the waters of Lake Victoria more than 3,000 miles down to the Mediterranean Sea. In ancient times Egypt comprised just the last 700 miles, the stretch of river downstream from the First Cataract at Aswan. Along most of this distance the Nile has scoured a deep and wide gorge in the desert plateau, on the floor of which a thick layer of rich clay silt has built up. It is this which has given the Nile valley its astonishing fertility and has transformed what might have been a mere geological curiosity into a thickly populated agricultural country.

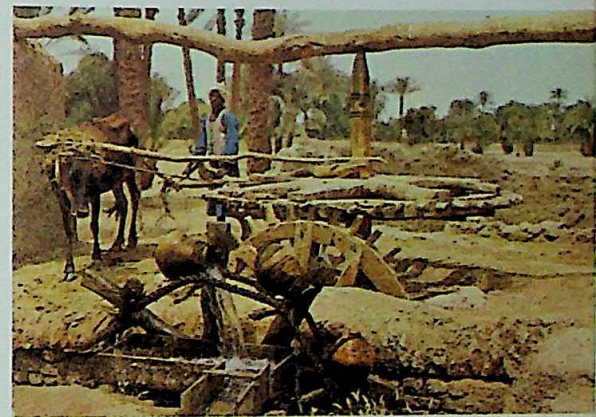
The Nile valley proper ends in the vicinity of Cairo. All that part of the valley lying to the north of Aswan, except for the last forty miles, formed the ancient kingdom of Shemau, or Upper Egypt as it is usually known. Today, however, this contains only about one-third of the total arable land in Egypt. For to the north the river flows out of the valley into a large bay in the coastline, now entirely choked with the same rich silt, to form a wide, flat delta, over which the river meanders in several branches. The two principal branches are the Damietta on the east and the Rosetta on the west. This delta, together with a short section of the valley, formed the ancient kingdom of Ta-mehu, or Lower Egypt.

The cultivated lands of the Nile valley and delta today present a flat, unvarying landscape of intensively cultivated fields, crossed by irrigation and drainage canals, and studded with towns and villages half-hidden by groves of palm trees. The transition from fields to desert is abrupt and striking. Civilisation visibly ends here, and on the east the desert plateau above the valley gradually rises to a jagged line of mountains bordering the Red Sea, while on the west it stretches for a distance of more than 3,000 miles to the Atlantic Ocean, an empty, silent, windswept land of gravel and sand.

Two primitive devices for irrigation.

Below: a shaduf is being used to raise water from a channel to sprinkle over a garden. (Tomb of Ipuw. Thebes. Nineteenth Dynasty.) More efficient is the sakiya, (right), a buffalo-driven water-wheel, probably introduced in the Graeco-Roman period.

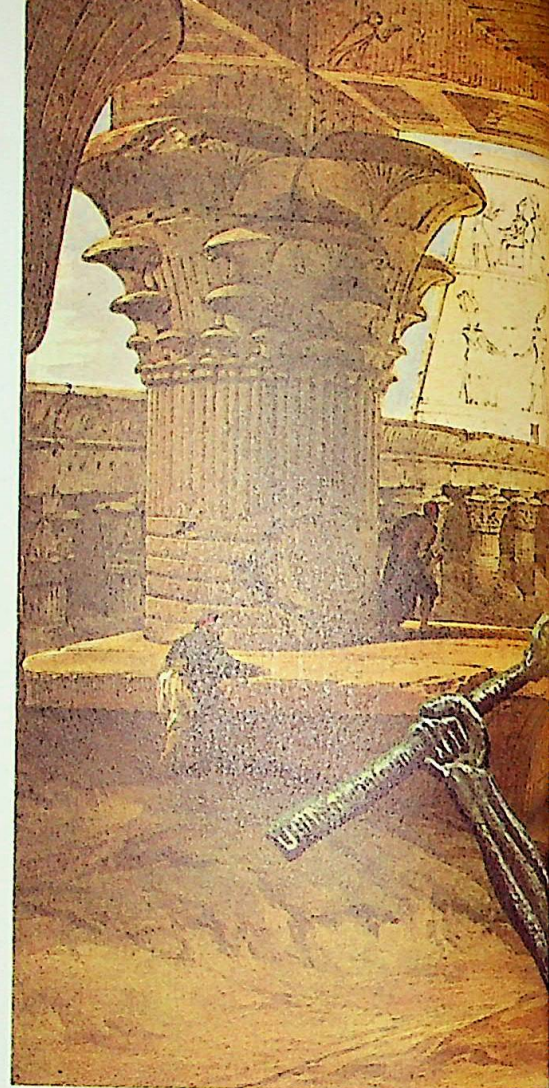
Far left: a wooden tomb panel. The owner of the tomb, Hesy-ra, a scribe's writing-kit over his right shoulder, sits before a table of loaves. Names of other offerings are written above in hieroglyphs. (Sakkara. Now in the Cairo Museum. Third Dynasty.)





Right: the temple of Horus at Edfu. Drawing made in 1829 (before excavation) with a recent photograph below. The drawing shows the temple half-filled with debris from dwellings and stables which had been built inside.

Left: a prehistoric Egyptian hunter, with spear and throwing-stick. (Hunters' Palette, British Museum and Louvre, Paris.) Below, right: a scene from one of the earliest historical documents showing King Narmer, wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt, in the heraldic pose of smiting a rebellious Lower Egyptian prince. (Narmer Palette from Hierakonpolis, Cairo Museum, First Dynasty.)



The agricultural cycle

The Nile receives two principal tributaries, the Blue Nile and the Atbara, both rising in the high, mountainous plateau of Ethiopia. The heavy summer rains in Ethiopia swell enormously the volume of water in these tributaries, enabling a greatly increased load of sediment to be carried, rich in minerals. Without the elaborate hydraulic controls which have been applied since the middle of the nineteenth century this surge of water is enough to flood the Nile valley and delta, forming a long, shallow lake, above which towns and villages emerge as islands, linked by causeways.

As the current is checked some of the silt settles on to the land and is left behind when the waters recede in October and November. If crops are then sown in the thick, wet mud, the warm, dry climate will have ripened them by March or April with little or no need for further watering. Then, after the harvest in summer, the ground dries and cracks, enabling aeration to take place, which prevents waterlogging and the excessive accumulation of salt. These three seasons formed the basic divisions of the ancient Egyptian's calendar: *Akhet* (inundation), *Peret* (growing) and *Shemu* (drought).

It is an ideal natural cycle but one that human ingenuity can still do much to improve. Banks can be built enclosing large

basins where the farmer can allow the waters to remain for a period before releasing them. Water can be raised mechanically to irrigate areas above the normal reach of the flood, or in summer, when the river is at its lowest, to irrigate the fields for a second crop. It is now very difficult to decide how far the ancient Egyptians improved on the natural cycle, and even more so to give dates to innovations.

The development of farming

When a river overflows its banks the coarsest and heaviest sediment is dropped first, leaving raised banks or levees along the sides of the channel. It is an irregular process since the course of a river is always slowly changing and some levees are left behind as low mounds on the flood plain. In the Nile valley and delta these would have provided ideal sites for the first farming. The expansion of agriculture down on to the plain must have required a certain amount of drainage by digging canals, since levees tend to hold back the subsiding flood waters.

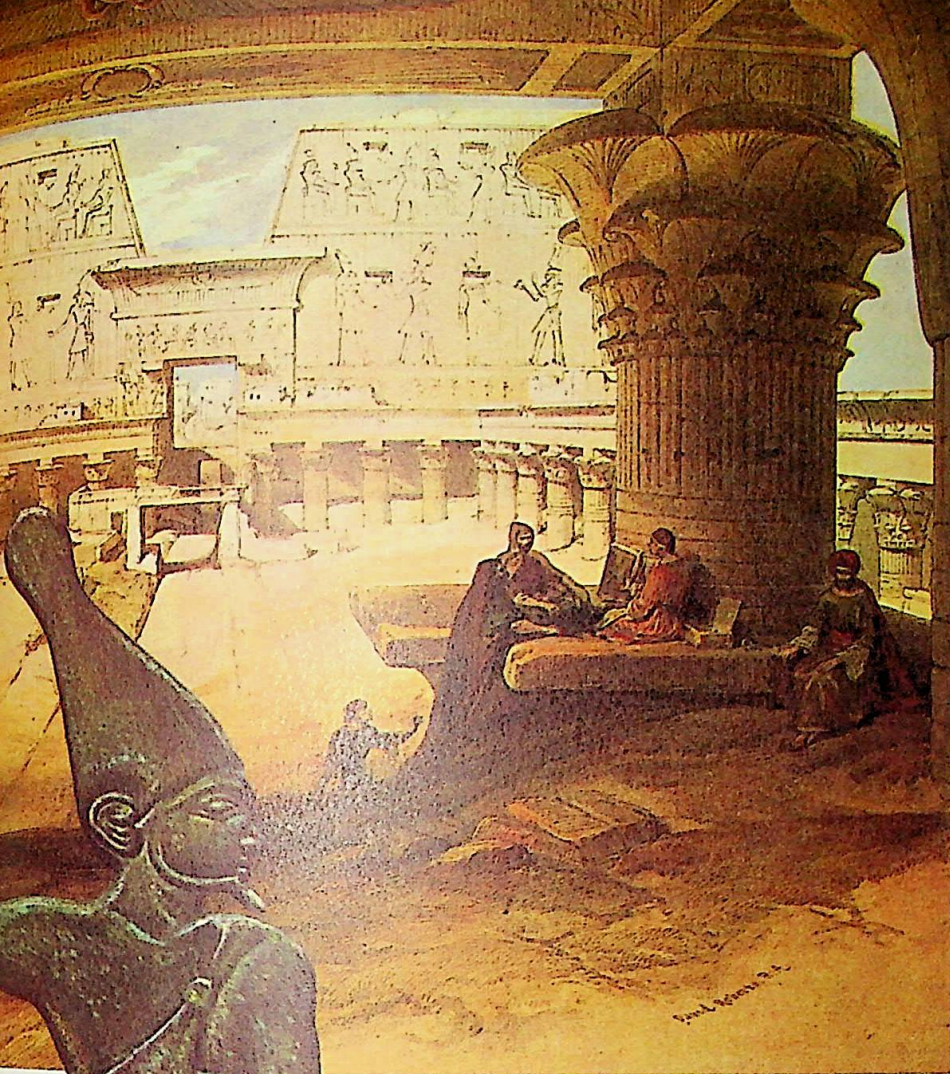
It is, however, unlikely that the early prehistoric farmers had to face a thick, perennially swampy jungle. The only perennial swamps were probably confined to the very edge of the flood plains, alongside the desert, where the least amount of sediment was dropped during the inundation and the

ground level was therefore at its lowest. The papyrus swamps which are so often depicted in ancient tomb paintings as the haunt of wild game and the hunting grounds of the rich must have been found here.

Methods of irrigation

Mechanical irrigation aids become necessary only when the single annual crop no longer supplies enough food for the community. The only mechanical aid apparently known to the ancient Egyptians was the *shaduf*, a primitive and highly inefficient device still in limited use today. Its construction is of the simplest: a pivoted, horizontal pole with a counterweight at one end and a bucket of some sort suspended at the other. It is tempting to regard it as being of immemorial antiquity. Yet before the sixteenth century B.C. there is not a single illustration of the *shaduf* in the countless tomb paintings of agricultural work, stereotyped though many are, nor is there a reference in contemporary literature.

The earliest representations depict only the watering of gardens, not the irrigation of fields. This suggests that one crop a year, grown on the land watered by the natural yearly inundation, was normally sufficient for Egypt's economy, though a few texts seem to indicate a second crop, confined to banks and islands and watered by hand.

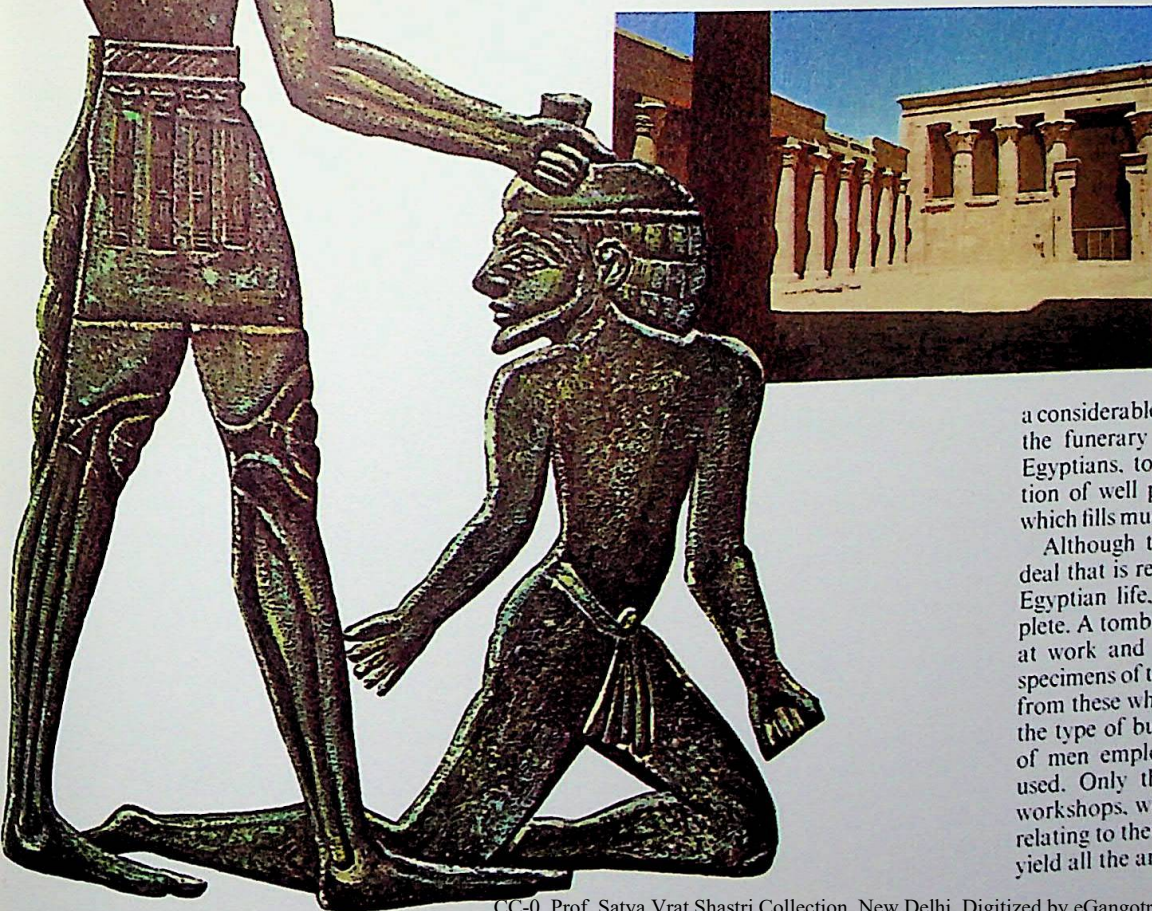


The crops grown were many and varied. Most important were barley and a kind of wheat called emmer, also flax for the manufacture of linen, and fruits and vegetables. There were sufficient pasture lands and supplies of fodder to support herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, goats and pigs, and ducks and geese. From the peripheral swamps and the river came water-fowl and fish. To neighbouring peoples Egypt must always have appeared immeasurably fertile and prosperous.

What archaeology reveals

The geography of Egypt has had a marked effect on its archaeological record. The dry sands have astonishing preservative qualities. The ancient Egyptians were doubtless aware of this and, like their modern successors, preferred to bury their dead on the sandy desert margins, rather than in the damp soil. Obviously where settlements were far from the desert, particularly in the delta, this was impracticable and the edge of the town had to suffice.

It was the custom to bury alongside the body articles of use or prized personal possessions which would be available to the dead man's spirit in the hereafter. There would often be provision for a regular service of offerings carried out by surviving relatives, and the chapels built for this contained commemorative and religious texts, and pictures of the happy life that the dead man hoped to live. As a result we have



a considerable amount of information about the funerary beliefs and practices of the Egyptians, together with a vast accumulation of well preserved illustrative material which fills museums the world over.

Although this material contains a great deal that is relevant to the study of ancient Egyptian life, the coverage is very incomplete. A tomb painting may show craftsmen at work and the tomb itself may contain specimens of tools used, but we cannot learn from these where the work was carried out, the type of building involved, the numbers of men employed, or the exact processes used. Only the meticulous excavation of workshops, with a lucky find of documents relating to their use and administration, can yield all the answers.

The limitations of archaeology

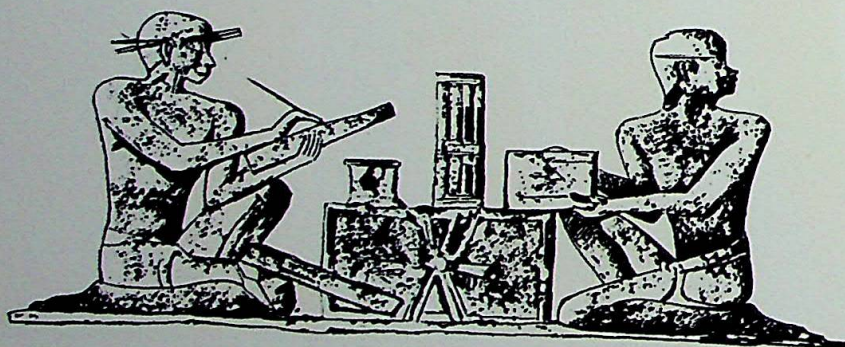
Today the demand for agricultural land in Egypt is probably heavier than ever before. Yet nearly all towns and villages lie on the cultivable flood plain. There is no reason to believe that in ancient times the situation was different. Indeed, with internal communications less well developed, the Nile, which was the chief means of transport, must have exerted an even stronger attraction in the location of important towns and cities. The natural levees must also have afforded the best sites for settlement in very early times. However, the annual deposition of Nile silt has meant a slow if irregular increase in the thickness of the arable soil, accompanied by a gradual horizontal spreading. In some places this soil has even buried the ancient cemeteries far underground, producing disconcerting gaps in archaeological knowledge. Most of the ancient cities, towns and villages have either been ploughed under fields, or lie

beneath existing towns. In either case the practical difficulties of locating them and then arranging for excavation to take place render them virtually inaccessible. Even so, some town sites are still accessible.

Other limiting factors have however been at work. The organic refuse, called *sebakh*, which has accumulated in the sites of ancient towns, provides a valuable and ready source of fertiliser for the fields. Site after site has in the past been almost completely destroyed above ground level by peasants digging for *sebakh*. Furthermore, since cemeteries contain the best of the ancient Egyptians' possessions, often perfectly preserved and in conditions of easy recovery, most archaeological activity has been concentrated in this sector. The need to excavate town sites has met with continued indifference: they are often partly waterlogged and partly obliterated by diggers for *sebakh*, and tend to produce large quantities of coarse household pottery fragments, matched by a dearth of the

Below left: two scribes at work with their equipment (Tomb of Akhet-hetep from Sakkara. Louvre Museum. Fifth Dynasty.) Below right: a group of officials being driven in to give evidence before a tribunal, after an initial beating. (Tomb of Mereruka. Sakkara. Sixth Dynasty.)

Top right: the earliest monumental stone building preserved in Egypt, the Step Pyramid of King Djoser, at Sakkara. Third Dynasty.



aesthetically pleasing. Yet these sites, offering the only hope of filling the huge gaps in our knowledge, are endangered by the needs of a rapidly expanding population.

Urban civilisation

The results of this pattern of work and preservation are easy to see. A fairly detailed history of the pyramids and of other kinds of tomb can be written, but the evidence for urban settlements is limited to a handful of sites from the desert edge, probably not typical and spread over a period of more than 3,000 years. It would,

however, be misleading to believe that Egypt did not possess large towns and cities comparable to those of other ancient civilisations, and that in the prehistoric period, with no written records, the extent of urbanisation is to be judged from the scanty traces of tiny, squalid hamlets excavated on the desert edge. It is still possible to see poverty-stricken settlements, but taken by themselves they offer no clue to the existence of the towns and cities of modern Egypt.

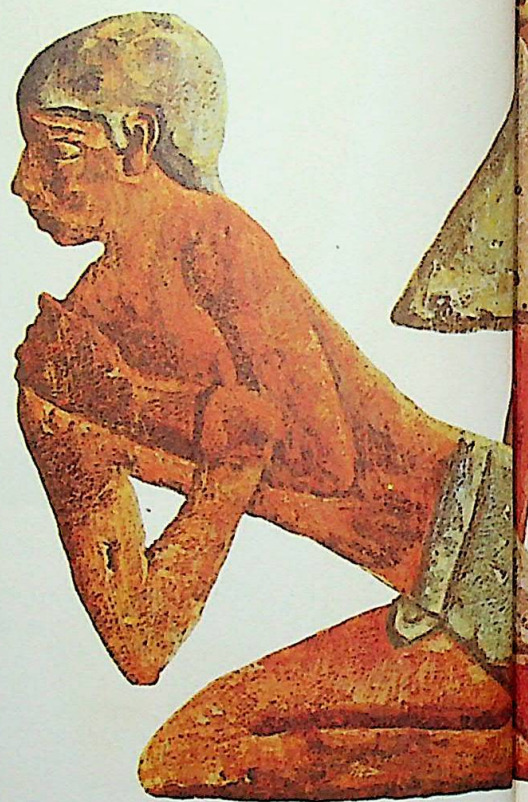
The same must be assumed for ancient times. There are huge gaps in our knowledge and our view of ancient Egyptian society must reflect this. Some of these gaps may be

filled as further discoveries are brought to light, others, unfortunately, may prove to be permanent.

Egyptian writing

Hieroglyphic

Egyptian civilisation was founded on writing: the ability to express graphically the sounds of speech. Considerable uncertainty exists over the precise affinities of the language spoken in ancient Egypt, although it does appear to have had links with the Semitic languages of western Asia. The





system used to write the language, however, was a purely local one. It was basically phonetic. Most of the signs used, although depicting actual objects, such as birds or items of furniture, stood only for sounds.

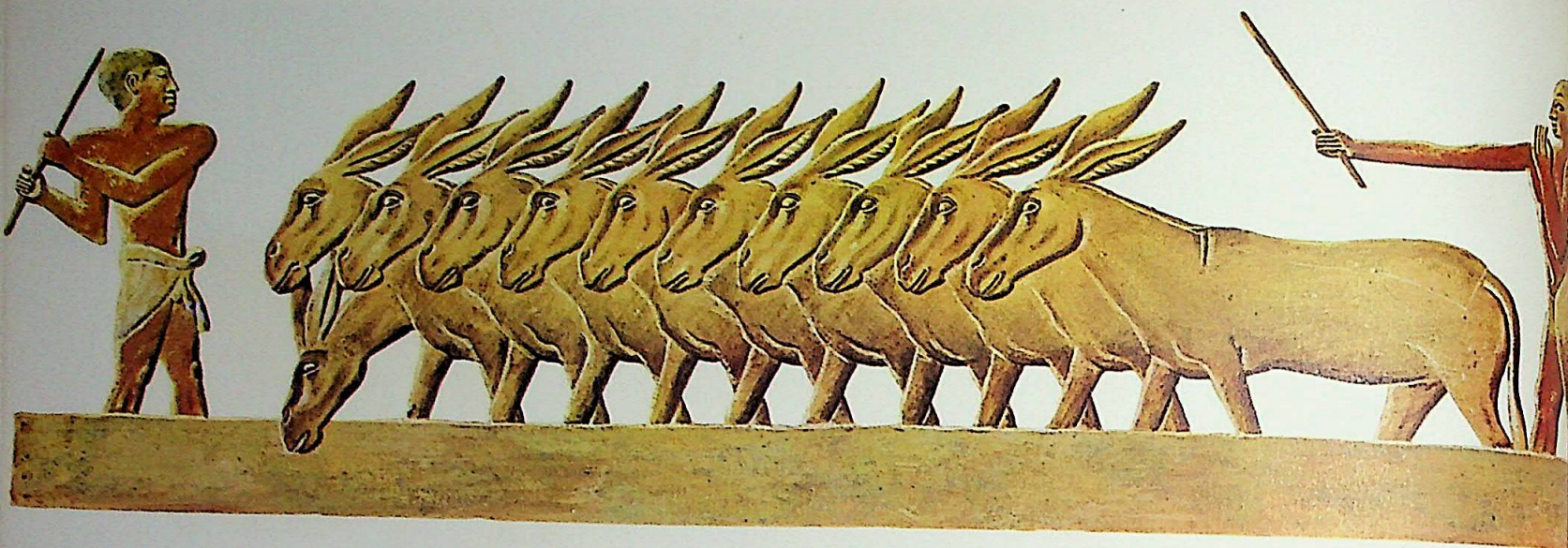
As an essential step towards simplicity vowels were disregarded and only the consonants were written. For example, the word for 'a basket' contained two consonants, *n* followed by *b*; the picture of a basket could also be used to write any other words which contained these two consonants in this order, such as the words for 'lord, owner of', and the adjective 'all, every'. In terms of modern English it is equivalent to using a

picture of a loaf, representing the consonants *l* and *f*, to write the words 'leaf', 'life', 'laugh' and 'aloof'. The context would normally indicate which of several possibilities was meant, but to assist the reader an additional symbol might be added indicating the general category to which the word belonged, such as a pair of legs walking to indicate a verb of motion, or a bound roll of papyrus to indicate something abstract.

The preservation of the old language

In religious matters the Egyptians were acutely aware of the correctness of patterns

laid down in the remote past, when the gods themselves had ruled the land. Perfection was complete conformity to the rules, whether in the design of a temple, the form of a text or the shape of a work of art. The same was true of the written signs, or hieroglyphs, which were used principally for monumental texts of a religious nature or in a religious setting. Thus until the very end of Egyptian civilisation great care was taken to preserve the exact form of the signs. No stylisation, with the accompanying loss of identity, was conceivable. Care was also taken in these texts to preserve a particular stage of the language which might be termed



'classical'. The success with which this process of deliberate fossilisation was met contributes much to the overall impression of timeless continuity which ancient Egypt produces.

Hieratic and demotic

This artificiality had a relatively limited application, and it occupies a major place in our impression of ancient Egypt only because its products were designed to last for eternity. In business and administrative documents which the Egyptians seem to have produced in prodigious quantities, the hieroglyphic system was rapidly modified to a flowing, longhand form known as hieratic, for use with a rush pen and ink. The normal writing material was papyrus, a paper-like substance made from thin strips of the papyrus reed. It is normally preserved only when kept completely dry. Consequently most of the ancient archives kept in towns and cities on the cultivated flood plain have not survived, and only the minute selection which has bears witness to the detailed nature of Egyptian record keeping.

The general style of hieratic changed over the course of centuries, and eventually lost most of its resemblance to the parent hieroglyphic. The ultimate form, demotic, began to come into use somewhere in the seventh century B.C. The form of the language of these everyday texts also changed considerably, although with a tendency to lag behind the spoken language. Eventually the system died out altogether, but the ancient language lingered on, written now in Greek letters, as the language of Christian or Coptic Egypt.

One final point needs to be made. Some of the hieroglyphs represented one consonant only. Here was the basis for an alphabetic script, employing only about twenty-four signs instead of the 700 or so normally in

use. However, a simplification of this nature would have been anathema to the ancient Egyptians. Some ancient scholars did actually experiment with the system, but always towards greater complexity, using the basic principles on which the system had been created to produce new alternatives to accepted signs. These pedantic exercises are fortunately confined to certain religious texts, and had their greatest period of activity under the Ptolemies and the Romans. Simplicity could only detract from the sacred character of the hieroglyphic system. It is perhaps significant that an alphabetic script had to wait until Christianity arrived.

'A man has perished, his corpse is as dust. All his kindred have turned to earth. But it is writing that causes him to be remembered in the month of the reader. Of more profit is a book than the house of the builder, than tomb chapels in the West. It is better than a well-founded castle, or a memorial-stone in the temple.' (Papyrus Chester Beatty IV, British Museum, Twelfth century B.C.)

The discovery of ancient Egypt

Once the civilisation of ancient Egypt had faded away and was overlaid first by Christianity and then by Islam, its vestiges remained the object only of idle curiosity. Its rediscovery was a feature of western Romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The chief stimulus was provided by the large team of scholars and engineers who formed part of the expedition with which Napoleon hoped to conquer Egypt in 1798. Their detailed description of the country included an extensive illustrated account of the ancient monuments.

In the nineteenth century the major western collections of Egyptian antiquities,





Scenes showing the preparation of offerings of food and drink for the spirits of the dead tomb owners.

Left: butchers at work carving a carcass into joints. (Tomb of Akhet-hetep from Sakkara. Louvre Museum. Fifth Dynasty.)

Above: a tethered longhorn cow being milked into a pot. (Tomb of Manefer from Sakkara. Berlin Museum. Late Fifth or Sixth Dynasty.)



such as that at the British Museum, were established, often in a spirit of fierce national rivalry. Size as well as beauty played a considerable part in the selection. Treasure hunting has probably been endemic in Egypt since ancient times, but to the lust for gold was now added the possibility of a profitable trade in antiquities with western museums and collectors. At the same time serious attempts began to be made to record accurately the visible monumental remains and to copy inscriptions.

In the twentieth century there has been a gradual change of emphasis. The urge to collect has been somewhat diminished by the realisation that a civilisation cannot be

described simply in terms of its more impressive monuments. A balanced view of society requires details of the minutiae of the daily life of people of all classes, and this can be gathered only by methodical and painstaking excavation and recording. The context in which an object is found has become as important as the object itself. A golden statue, on its own, tells us little about anything except golden statues.

The decipherment of Egyptian

The framework into which all this material can be fitted has been provided by the decipherment of the ancient script and the



Two forms of sport.

Above: a mock combat between the crews of light skiffs. The picnicking observer on the left is the 'overseer of sculptors, Niankh-ptah', perhaps the man responsible for the scenes.

Right: youths wrestling at what seems to have been a fair at the annual review of the estate's produce. (Both from the tomb of Ptah-hetep, Sakkara, Fifth Dynasty.)

subsequent analysis of its language. The initial clues were provided by a bilingual text, written in both Greek and in ancient Egyptian: the Rosetta Stone of the British Museum. The main credit for decipherment belongs to the French scholar, Jean Champollion, working on foundations laid by Åkerblad of Sweden and Thomas Young of England. As a result of over 150 years of study the main framework of Egyptian grammar is established with some certainty, and reasonably reliable translations can now be provided for most texts.

Yet the scope for further work remains enormous. As the techniques of archaeology grow more refined each year, so the amount of information which excavation can yield increases, and not only in quantity but in variety also. Moreover, archaeologists are at last obtaining the proper equipment for tackling the excavation of difficult town sites on the flood plain. The information they can yield must greatly supplement our knowledge of ancient Egyptian society, to the point where we can reconstruct in some detail the overall shape of a major pre-Classical civilisation.

Ancient Egypt: the sources of history

The earliest surviving Egyptian records date from about 3200 B.C. and, by a fortunate coincidence, the ancient Egyptians themselves commonly began their enumera-

tion of kings and dynasties at about the same point of time. It can, therefore, be said with some certainty that Egyptian history begins about 3200 B.C. This date, like others in Egyptian history, has been calculated on the basis of ancient astronomical observations, combined with information derived from ancient lists of kings, and must be taken as a rough approximation. Prior to this the civilisation of prehistoric Egypt can be defined and recorded only in terms of purely archaeological material arranged in a sequence of groups. Dates can be calculated only by scientific techniques, the most common using measurements of the proportion of radio-active carbon present in ancient organic material, such as charcoal or corn grains.

The history of ancient Egypt appears to be largely the history of its ruling families: their architectural achievements and military exploits occupy an unduly large proportion of modern history books. This is a consequence of the survival of a multiplicity of stone monuments designed to commemorate Egypt's rulers. The divine king was the most important element in Egyptian society. His deeds ensured the continued existence of world order, and recording them gave proof of his continued efficacy.

The monuments portray a timeless, regulated world in which the king fraternises confidently with the other gods, receives their blessings and ensures their well-being. He triumphs over foes and receives the





homage of his subjects. The smooth, un-rippled surface of royal power extends from age to age, back to the rule of the gods.

Nevertheless, one should not be deceived by this attractive facade. The familiar features of absolute royal power—plots, usurpations, feuds and corruption—were present in ancient Egypt also, even though harsh realities like this had no place in a divinely ordered society.

The limitations of historical sources

The limitations inherent in the historical sources have been magnified by the passage of time. Only a tiny proportion of what was once available has survived, and this in a highly arbitrary and irregular way. The most important centres of documentation were the temples, particularly those in the capital, which served as repositories of important documents and records of successive kings.

In the Nile valley three cities functioned at different times as the capital. The site of the first, Memphis, is well known—fifteen miles south of Cairo on the west bank of the Nile—but it has hardly been touched by excavation. The second, Amenemhat-ith-tawy, has never been located. Only in the third, Thebes, do the temples survive to any great extent. It is noticeable that when the centre of power is at Thebes, the number of sources increases considerably.

For the period of the Middle Kingdom (roughly the nineteenth and twentieth centuries B.C.), when the capital was at Amenemhat-ith-tawy, official documents are almost non-existent. Records are even more incomplete for the delta region, where destruction has been intense and excavation negligible. A connected history of the area hardly exists at all, and when ancient Egypt divides into its two component parts and civil war results, the conflict is seen only through the eyes of Upper Egypt. This is unfortunate since the delta had the closest contact with other civilisations.

The work of Manetho

Nevertheless, the 3000 years of Egyptian history have produced a formidable amount of documentation, and to reduce it to some order a system of classification has had to be adopted. The one universally accepted was created in the third century B.C. by an

Egyptian priest, Manetho. Using a mass of documents no longer available he compiled a history of his country, and divided the kings into thirty dynasties. His work has unfortunately survived only in a number of inaccurate, abridged copies. The principal drawback to Manetho's work is that there are few means of checking the nature of the sources which he used. Sometimes they may have been contemporary with the events they describe, but at other times they seem to have been later traditions which had collected distortions, or simply folk tales. Nevertheless, convenience and familiarity have ensured the continued acceptance of Manetho's scheme.

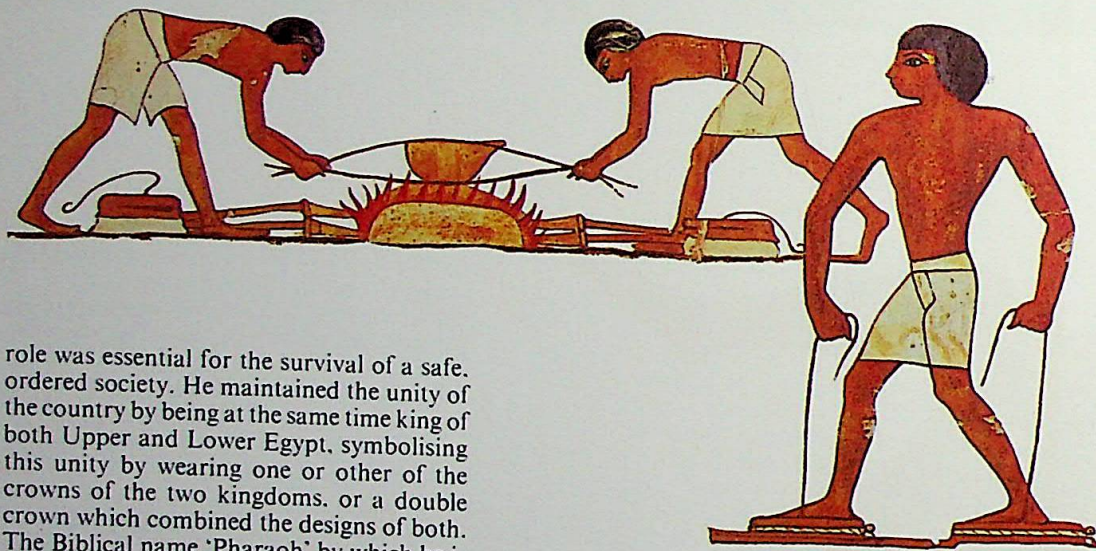
Divine kingship

As mentioned earlier, the king of Egypt was counted among the gods. For 3000 years the monuments proclaimed this even when the king was a distant foreign emperor and his

Egypt had ample access to copper ore, and although bronze was known from at least the twentieth century B.C., copper continued in common use until well into the middle of the second millennium.

Below left: smelting in a pottery crucible. Draught for the fire was provided by foot-operated bellows. (Tomb of Rekhmire, Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Below: the pyramids at Giza, tombs of the kings of the Fourth Dynasty. An impression of pyramid construction is given on the right. The roughly contemporary statue is of the priest Ka-aper. (From Sakkara. Now in the Cairo Museum. Late Fourth or early Fifth Dynasty.)



role was essential for the survival of a safe, ordered society. He maintained the unity of the country by being at the same time king of both Upper and Lower Egypt, symbolising this unity by wearing one or other of the crowns of the two kingdoms, or a double crown which combined the designs of both. The Biblical name 'Pharaoh' by which he is now commonly known is derived from a term for his palace, 'the great house', which was later used as a respectful circumlocution for the king himself. Every Egyptian temple preserved the fiction that the king alone made contact with the gods who dwelt within.

Although the scenes on the outer walls representing the king triumphing almost single-handedly over Egypt's enemies are often misinterpreted as a sign of vainglorious megalomania, they were intended to ensure, by the workings of sympathetic magic, that he would keep the country safe from foreign aggression.

'One who slays the foreign bowmen without the blow of a club, who shoots the arrow without drawing the bowstring . . . The tongue of His Majesty restrains Nubia, his utterances cause the Asians to flee.'
'Lo, he is a place of refuge whose hand is not to be deflected.'

'Lo, he is a shelter who protects the fearful from his enemy.'

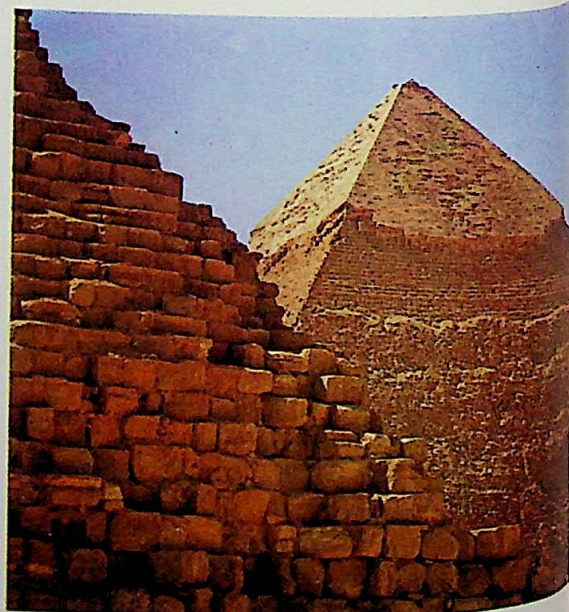
'Lo, he is a refreshing shade which is cool in summer.'

'Lo, he is a warm dry corner in the winter season.'

'Lo, he is a mountain which shuts off the tempest in the season when heaven rages.'

(Hymns to King Senwosret III. Kahun Papyri. About 1850 B.C.)

Theology placed the king firmly in the divine pantheon. He was an embodiment of the ancient falcon-god Horus, and he could claim parentage from some of the greatest of the gods, particularly the sun-god, Re, and later the Theban god, Amun. Finally, at his death he was given a temple where he was worshipped like any other god. However, where the king differed from other





gods was in appearing on earth in the form of a human being, ruling the lives of the people of Egypt. Some literary texts portray this human side of the king, who is depicted graciously pardoning a returned exile or finding amusement in being rowed up and down a lake by beautiful virgins clad only in fishnets. Particularly revealing, however, are two sets of instructions from a king to his son which illustrate the responsibilities and burdens of kingship.

'Be a craftsman in speech that you may be strong. . . . Speech is more valorous than any fighting. No one can circumvent the skilful mind.' 'Carry out justice while you remain on earth. Quiet the weeper, oppress not the widow, dispossess no man of the property of his father, interfere not with officials at

their posts. Beware of punishing wrongfully.'

'Trust not in length of years. A lifetime is regarded as [just] an hour. A man survives after death, his deeds are placed beside him in heaps. Existence yonder is truly for eternity, whoever disputes this is a fool. And as for him who reaches it without having done wrong, he shall exist there like a god, moving freely like the lords of eternity.' (Instruction for King Merikare. About 2020 B.C.)

The second instruction claims to be written by King Amenemhat I, about 1790 B.C. after an unsuccessful attempt at assassination. The instruction is addressed to his son and heir, the future King Senwosret I.

'Be wary of those subordinate to you lest something terrible happen to which no thought has been given. Approach them not in your loneliness, confide not in a brother, know not a friend, create no intimates for yourself. There is nothing to be gained by it . . . It was he who ate my food that made mischief; the one to whom I had given my hands created terror.'

Kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt

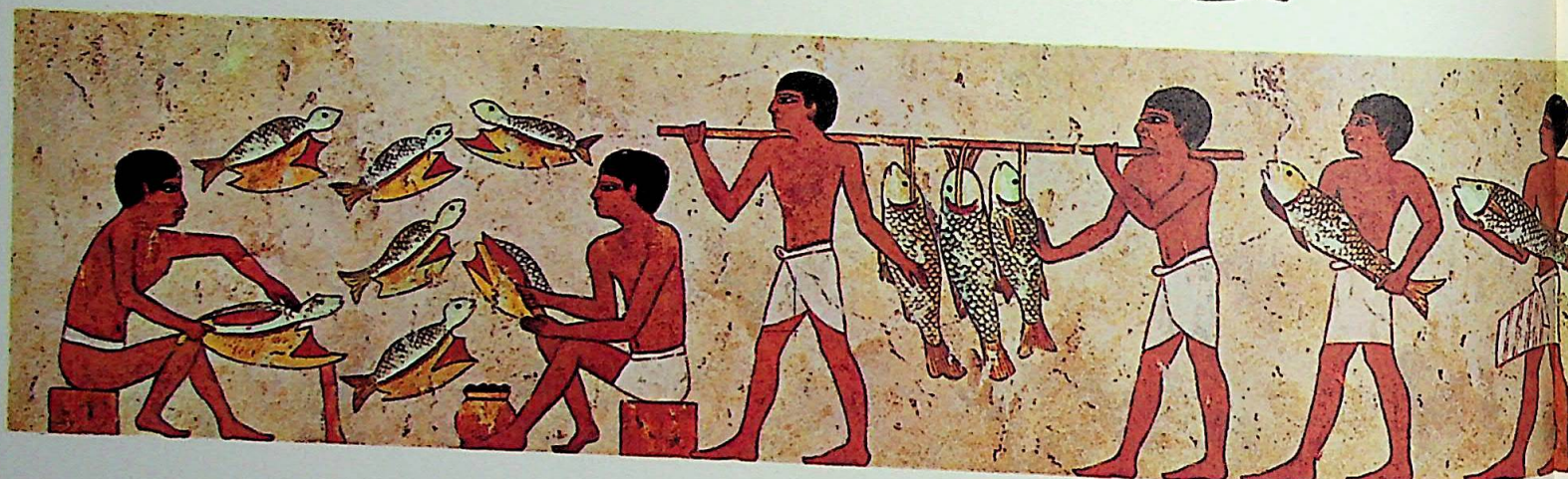
For much of the later prehistoric period Upper and Lower Egypt seem to have possessed different cultures, that of Lower Egypt appearing considerably more backward and impoverished than that of its southern neighbour. It is possible that this division into two cultural zones reflected the

Farm produce being brought for offerings for the spirits of the dead.

Right: fruit, vegetables and sweet-smelling lotus flowers.

Far right: live ducks. (Both from the tomb of Akhet-hetep from Sakkara. Louvre Museum. Fifth Dynasty.)

Below and right: fresh fish being brought to be gutted. (Tomb of Nebemakhet, Giza. Fourth Dynasty.)



existence of two independent states.

However, towards the end of the pre-historic period Upper Egyptian culture spread northwards and evidence of this has been found in the eastern delta. The culture of Lower Egypt appears to have vanished without trace, the civilisation of historic Egypt being a direct development of Upper Egyptian culture. One monument is of vital importance here. This is the Palermo Stone which once, before being broken and largely lost, summarised the events of every year of the reign of each king of the first five dynasties. However, at the very top it seems also to have listed the names of kings who ruled before the First Dynasty. In the little pictures of kings which accompany these names some wear only the crown of Lower Egypt, but at least seven wear the double crown. The unification thus clearly took place before 3200. Manetho's First Dynasty, and this may be linked with the final, northward spread of Upper Egyptian culture.

The chronological order of kingship

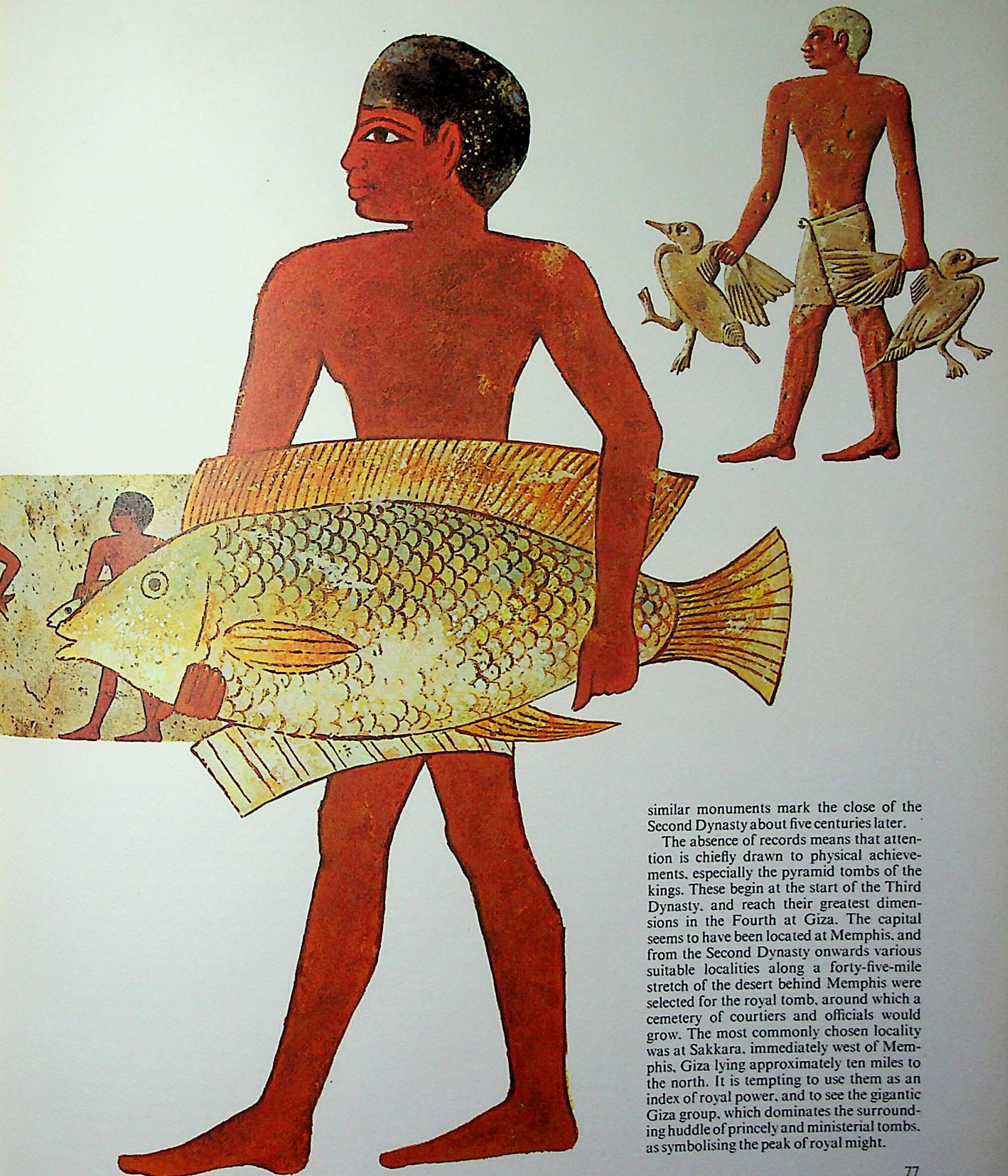
Manetho seems to have been drawing on traditions of kingship which first found expression in the thirteenth century B.C. All the authorities start their enumeration of kings with Meni (Greek, Menes), except one which starts six kings later. Why did they ignore the evidence preserved on the much earlier Palermo Stone? In modern reconstructions Meni may occupy the beginning of the yearly enumeration, but he must still have been placed below, and thus, later than, the kings of the top row. It is possible that some legend had attached itself to Meni which made subsequent kings wish to be counted as his successors, or more likely, a political event of great importance had taken place in his reign, such as the founding of Memphis, which was attributed to Meni by the historian Herodotus.

It is also possible that the earliest

documents had been lost, or had never in fact existed, since written records were not yet being kept. The Palermo Stone would have therefore recorded simply an oral tradition. It is difficult now to guess at the reasoning by which a tradition of legitimate kingship was reached. It seems clear, however, that the First Dynasty did not begin with the unification of Egypt.

The first period of greatness

The first two dynasties have been grouped together by historians as the Archaic Period, and the next four as the Old Kingdom. Although they lasted together about a thousand years, they have left remarkably few historical data. There is, however, evidence that the continued existence of the union of the two Egypts was threatened. One of the earliest historical documents commemorates a victory of King Narmer over a rebellious prince of the delta, and



similar monuments mark the close of the Second Dynasty about five centuries later.

The absence of records means that attention is chiefly drawn to physical achievements, especially the pyramid tombs of the kings. These begin at the start of the Third Dynasty, and reach their greatest dimensions in the Fourth at Giza. The capital seems to have been located at Memphis, and from the Second Dynasty onwards various suitable localities along a forty-five-mile stretch of the desert behind Memphis were selected for the royal tomb, around which a cemetery of courtiers and officials would grow. The most commonly chosen locality was at Sakkara, immediately west of Memphis, Giza lying approximately ten miles to the north. It is tempting to use them as an index of royal power, and to see the gigantic Giza group, which dominates the surrounding huddle of princely and ministerial tombs, as symbolising the peak of royal might.



Another scene illustrating the preparation of food to be offered to the spirits of the dead tomb owners. Funerary cults, with all their elaborate ritual, played a fundamental role in the lives of the ancient Egyptians. Butchers are seen here at work preparing meat offerings. (Tomb of Djoserkare-seneb. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

The decline of pyramid building

As the period progresses private tomb inscriptions begin to afford glimpses of the elaborate, centralised administration which gave the kings access to the resources and power which their monumental undertakings required. The tone of these inscriptions is one of total sycophantic service, which brings material rewards.

With the end of the Sixth Dynasty, around 2200 B.C., the sequence of royal pyramids ceases, probably because they had become so small and roughly constructed as to escape discovery in the still only partially excavated necropolis at Sakkara. Manetho lists a Seventh and an Eighth Dynasty of Memphis, but, without contemporary cemeteries, the kings are little more than simply names.

If the pyramids are taken as an index of royal power, why should the construction of pyramids have come to an end? It is

very possible that continued building caused considerable strain on the economic system. Each pyramid formed a separate economic unit with its own administration and sources of wealth, established in perpetuity for the cult of the dead king. Over the centuries the wealth of these pyramids must have accumulated to become a significant proportion of the total wealth of the country, to which the living king presumably had little access. Conditions in the delta are quite unknown, but in Upper Egypt there are suggestions that from the twenty-fifth century onwards there was a degree of transference of power from the monarchy to local governors.

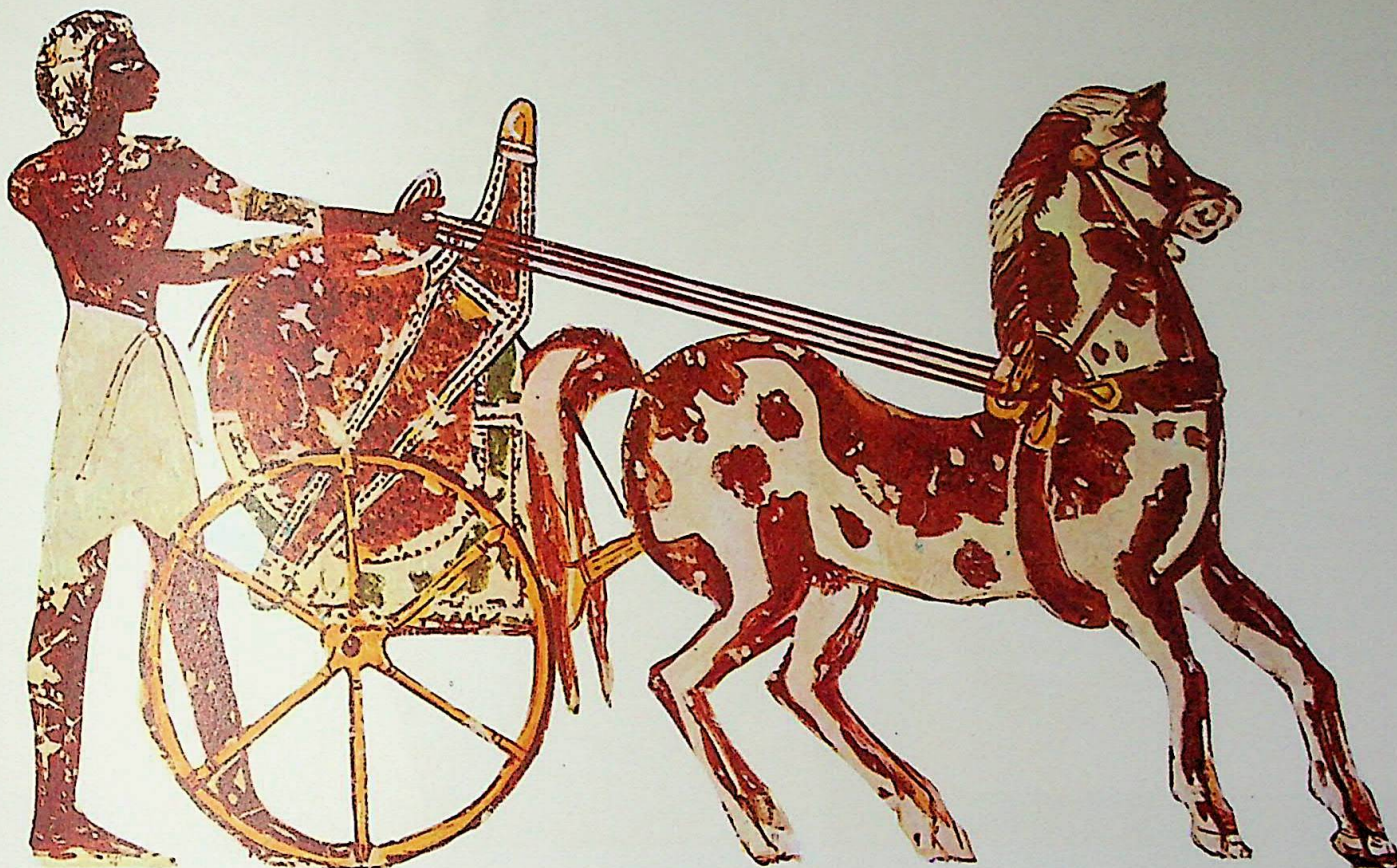
The first Theban revolt

The five centuries of the Old Kingdom were undoubtedly marked by violent struggles for power, although their echoes hardly reach the serene world of official monuments. To bridge the gap between the divine nature of the institution of kingship and reality in the

person of the king must have required considerable rationalisation on the part of the more thoughtful and educated members of society. However, the conflicts which now took place seem to have resulted from the fact that for a time Egypt possessed two contemporary lines of kings, each claiming the divine kingship of the whole country.

After his Eighth Dynasty Manetho lists a Ninth and Tenth Dynasty, based at Herakleopolis, a city about fifty miles south of Memphis, although it is not certain whether they ruled from here rather than from Memphis. Their rule was challenged by princes of Thebes, as yet a relatively unimportant provincial city nearly 450 miles upstream from Memphis. Ruling from here with their own court and administration, they depicted themselves as divine rulers of all Egypt, although their power cannot have extended much further than Abydos, 100 miles downstream.

Within a space of probably less than fifty years a further palace revolution appears to



The two-horse war chariot was adopted by the Egyptians from western Asia, possibly from the Hyksos, for its first recorded use was during the second Theban revolt. The Egyptians made improvements, and the model illustrated is of the six-spoked type which replaced the four-spoked chariot about 1400 B.C. (Tomb of Menena. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

have taken place at Thebes, and the succeeding dynasty, the Twelfth, established an entirely new capital city, named after the founder, Amenemhat-ith-tawy. '[King] Amenemhat seizes the two lands.' It seems to have been situated a short distance south of Memphis, but has never been discovered. This has unfortunately deprived historians of almost any historical documents of value, yet, as with the Old Kingdom, the material culture indicates that the two centuries of Twelfth Dynasty rule, called the Middle Kingdom, represent one of the most flourishing periods of Egyptian civilisation.

Literature of the Middle Kingdom

One fascinating aspect of the Middle Kingdom is its secular literature. The range was wide—from fantastic travellers' tales to homilies exhorting loyalty to the king. However, through some texts there runs a mood of scepticism and disquiet which

accords ill with the confident, official facade of society. One recurrent theme is a despairing vision of an anarchic society in which every facet of ordered, civilised life is given a reverse, negative image. It finds its fullest expression in an elaborate literary composition, the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, which probably belongs to the end of the period:

'Truly, poor men have become owners of wealth, and he who could not provide [even] sandals for himself is now the possessor of riches.'

'Truly, the laws of the council-chamber are thrown out; truly, men walk on them in public places and poor men tear them up in the streets.'

'If only there were an end to mankind, with no conception, with no birth. Then would the earth cease from noise and tumult be no more.'

In a similar vein is the discrediting of some of the great kings of the past. An

example occurs in the Westcar Papyrus, in which a series of simple and amusing magicians' tales leads on to the story of the doom of the house of Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid at Giza, whose dynasty was destined to be replaced by pious kings of the Fifth Dynasty. The legend of the impiety of Khufu's family took firm root and was repeated both by Herodotus and Manetho.

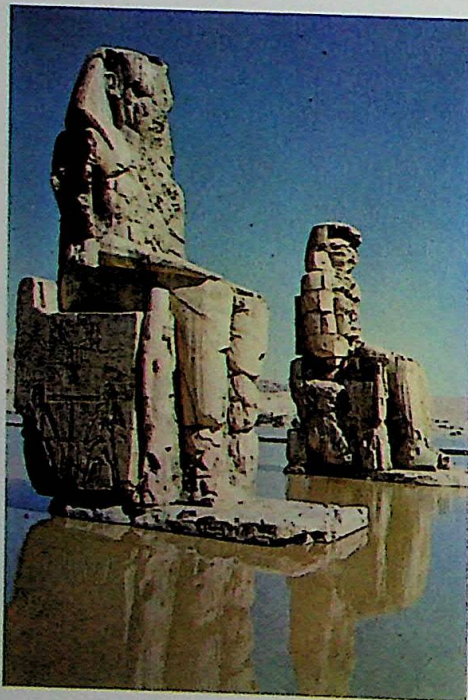
In another story, still popular in the seventh century B.C., against a background of legal injustice, King Neferkare, probably the last king of the Sixth Dynasty, steals out of his palace each night to indulge a homosexual relationship with one of his generals. It can only be conjectured that the Theban revolt had brought home to some how insubstantial were the basic assumptions on which their society rested, and forced them to consider how fragile were the defences against anarchy. This mood of pessimism affected the kingship itself and it is to this period that the *Instruction of King Amenemhat* belongs. It is also reflected in the ex-

pression of brooding weariness which characterises the statues of the last kings.

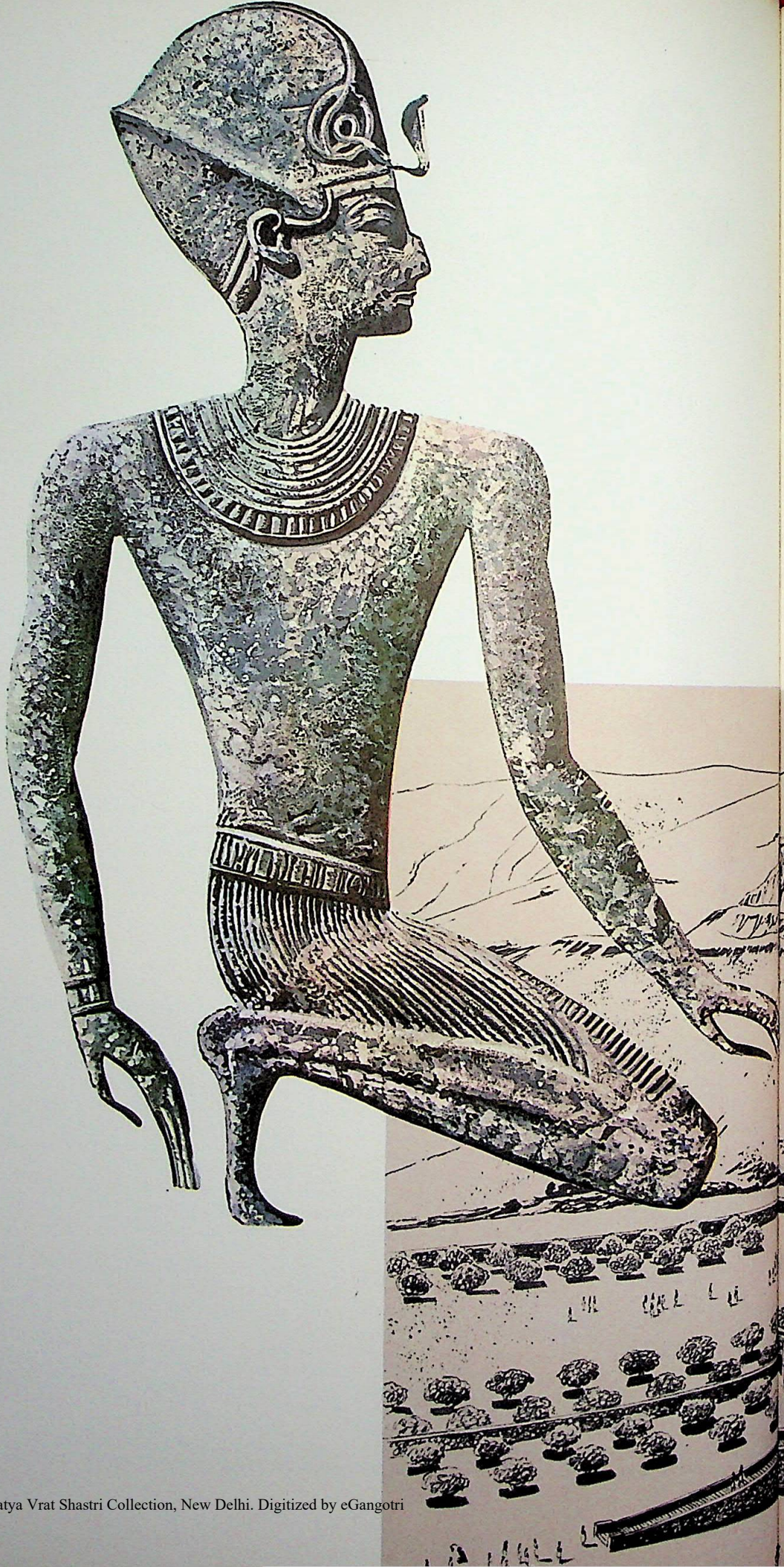
The coming of the Hyksos

Contemporary records fail to show any historical break between the kings of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties: the change was presumably the result of a palace revolution. Yet the construction of royal tombs (still pyramids) follows exactly the same trend as at the end of the Old Kingdom. Upper Egypt appears to have been still ruled from the old capital of Amenemhat-ith-tawy, but there is no means of knowing if this was also true of Lower Egypt. One later king-list records at least sixty kings for the century or so of Thirteenth-Dynasty rule, allowing most of them extremely short reigns. Court intrigue was clearly at its most active. Significantly, one of the kings used as his official royal name simply his title, 'The General'.

Against this background an event of



Above: the two colossal statues once stood in front of the nearby mortuary temple of King Amenhetep III, also of the Eighteenth Dynasty.



considerable importance was taking place. No doubt largely attracted by the wealth of the Middle Kingdom and the fertility of its countryside, people from Palestine began to drift southwards into Egypt. Some found their way into Upper Egyptian households as domestic servants. A few managed to make a successful career in the civil service, and presumably the Biblical story of Joseph's enslavement in Egypt belongs here. Eventually, around 1680 B.C., one of them was able to claim for himself the kingship of Upper and Lower Egypt, and to found a dynasty of six kings, the Hyksos (meaning literally 'princes of foreign lands'), who were to rule for just over a century. They appear to have ruled from Avaris in the eastern delta.

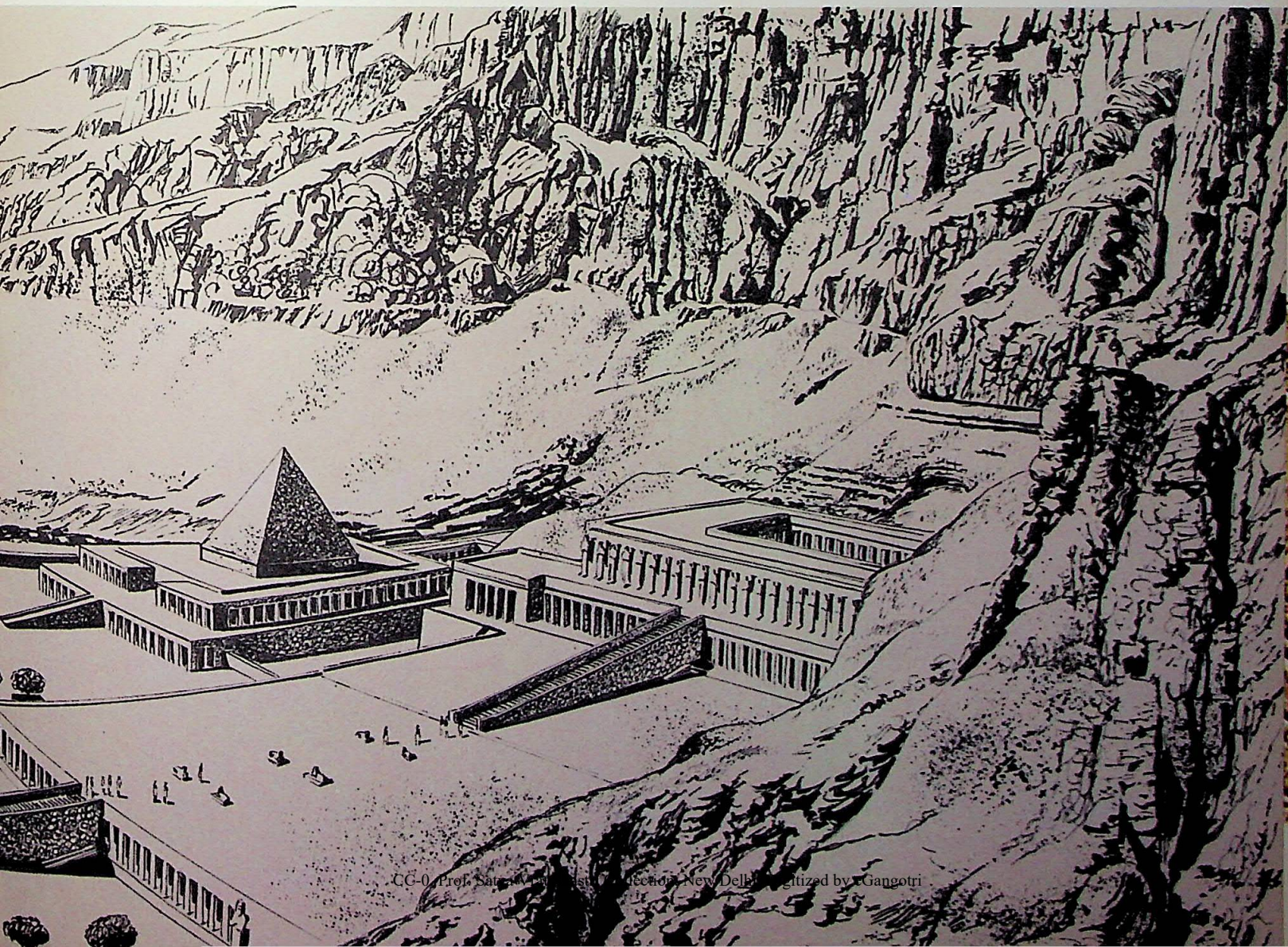
Manetho recorded a tradition which said they overwhelmed Egypt with a barbarian invasion, but this seems to derive from the xenophobia which accompanied the second Theban revolt when the princes of Thebes again declared themselves kings of all Egypt, and carried out a successful civil war against the Hyksos. Monuments depict the Hyksos in the traditional guise of Egyptian

Pharaohs, and in Upper Egypt at least there is no sign of an invasion or trace of an alien culture. However, until more is known of the archaeology of the delta the precise nature and scale of this movement must remain uncertain. Nevertheless, the Thebans found themselves fighting also against Egyptians serving the Hyksos during the war to expel the foreigners, and there is a record of at least one revolt subsequent to the Theban victory. This was clearly not a simple nationalist movement.

The period of expansion

The Thebans were faced with two enemies: the Hyksos to the north, whose territory may have included part of Palestine, and an African kingdom centred on the northern Sudan. The defeat of these two opponents carried the successful Upper Egyptian armies far beyond their earlier frontiers, and seems to have whetted an appetite for military conquest. Probably for the first time the Egyptians set out on regular military campaigns with the aim not merely

The spirits of deceased kings were served by a cult which required temples as big as those built for the greatest of Egypt's gods. Below: the mortuary temple at Thebes built for Queen Hatshepsut of the Eighteenth Dynasty who, while acting as regent for her nephew, Tuthmosis III, succeeded in taking over the position of Pharaoh. In the background is the temple and tomb of one of the Eleventh Dynasty kings (about 2050 B.C.).





of conquering and plundering, but also of establishing some sort of rudimentary control over the conquered territories. In this way foreign aggression against Egypt could be prevented, and tribute regularly exacted. This increase in material wealth from abroad and the psychological effect of military success on a grand scale had a marked effect on Egyptian culture.

The new dynasty, Manetho's Eighteenth, was the beginning of the New Kingdom which was to be the third great period of cultural achievement. Thebes was retained as the capital, and the survival of many of its buildings meant that a mass of documentation has been made available on a scale hitherto lacking. The domestic quarters of Thebes on the east bank of the Nile, the palaces, government offices, mansions and slums have entirely disappeared under fields or under the modern town of Luxor. However, the temples, which must always have dominated the city, have survived remarkably intact.

The original local god of Thebes, Amun, now began to reap the reward for the dazzling success which he had brought to the Theban kings. A sizeable share of the spoils of conquest was bequeathed to him by grateful sovereigns, which provided for the erection of a complex of stone temples on a vast scale. These were to be continually enlarged and embellished during the next nine centuries. Across the river, another group of temples was constructed on the edge of the fields on a scale matching those on the east bank. Each provided for the cult of a dead king and was the centre of an economic unit with its own farms, villages, and administration.

The royal tomb was no longer ostentatiously covered by a pyramid, but was hidden away in the remote Valley of the Kings, no doubt in the hopes of greater security against tomb robbery. In the hills and desert behind the royal mortuary temples a warren of private tombs proliferated, which included many for the courtiers and chief officials of the realm.

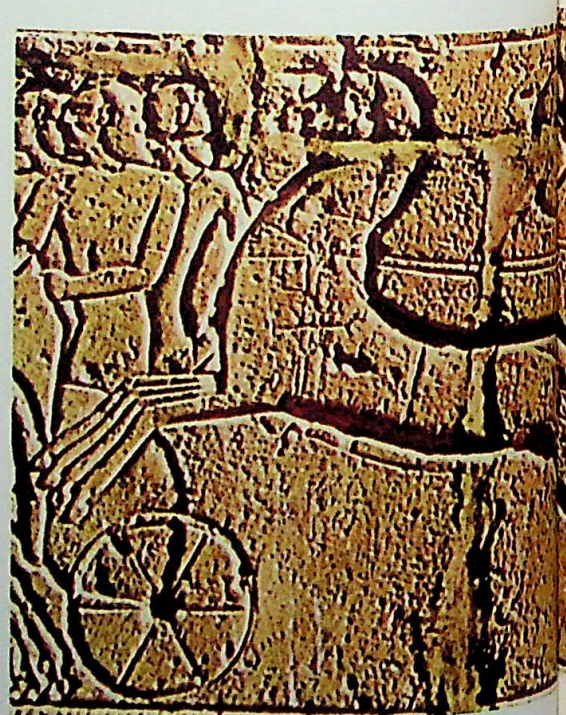
Their paintings of contemporary scenes are one of the chief sources of information about life at the centre of Pharaonic Egypt, and have, moreover, provided many of the pictures which have been used to illustrate this book. Nevertheless, Memphis was able to retain much of its former prestige: kings continued to reside there from time to time, and its naval dockyards witnessed the departure and return of the various expeditions bound for Palestine and Syria.

The worship of the sun-god

Contemporary documentation provides some evidence of the internal power politics of the age. The most obvious division of power was between the king and Amun, who not only in theory sired the kings and granted them their victories, but in practice sanctioned important decisions by means of oracles. The priests of Amun had at their disposal immense wealth, and at times were granted authority over all other priesthoods of Egypt. The official documents give no hint of whatever tensions must have arisen, and it was clearly not a straightforward rivalry since the king retained the right of appointment, and many former royal companions appear in the priesthood.

It is the events at the end of the Eighteenth

Dynasty which give some indication of the conflicts which had preceded them. They centre on the person of King Akhenaten, who came to the throne when the Egyptian empire was at the height of its power and splendour. The precise reasons for his actions are difficult to understand, but his main impulse seems to have been an attempt to alter the relationship between the king and the gods, and in particular to redress





From the Eighteenth Dynasty onwards the Egyptian army was composed of both infantry and charioteers.

Left: a company of infantry accompanying the king on a lion hunt. They carry axes, spears, clubs, bows and shields. (Painted wooden chest from the tomb of Tutankhamun at Thebes. Now in Cairo Museum. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Below: Hittite charioteers at the battle of Kadesh, opposing Egyptian forces under Rameses II. The team of three could dismount at the end of a charge and engage in hand-to-hand combat. (Scene from the Ramesseum, mortuary temple of Rameses II at Thebes. Nineteenth Dynasty.)

Top right: a line of men bearing offerings for the tomb owner. The offerings include light tables supporting crates of fruit, bunches of grapes and pomegranates, and garlands of papyrus and lotus flowers. (Tomb of Sebek-hetep. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)





whatever imbalance had grown up between the king and Amun. He did this by fostering a version of the old solar cult, which excluded Amun altogether, and at the same time elevated the king to near equality with the sun-god, who was worshipped in the form of the sun's disc, the Aten.

Akhenaten's religion will be examined in a little more detail later on. For the moment it should be emphasised that there is no evidence for any direct foreign influence, or that it was intended to be a popular movement.

The first important practical application of Akhenaten's ideas seems to have been the construction of a large solar temple adjacent to the principal temple of Amun at Karnak in Thebes. It contained colossal statues of the king and its walls were covered with scenes showing him worshipping the sun-god, all conceived in the strange new style of art which Akhenaten had introduced, and which must have shocked those who considered the traditional artistic modes of expression as sacred and god-given. Thebes nonetheless remained the domain of Amun.

The logical step was to abandon it completely and this Akhenaten did around his fifth year as king, moving to a new capital built on virgin ground, the construction of which had probably begun shortly after his accession. It was called 'The horizon of the sun disc', (modern Amarna), and lay about 230 miles downstream from Thebes, straggling along the edge of the desert for about six miles. In the centre was the gigantic, symmetrically-planned palace linked by a bridge over the main street to a smaller private set of apartments, the main temple of the Aten (on a similarly vast scale), and the principal government offices. To the north and south stretched streets of spacious, bungalow-like mansions hemmed in by the houses of the poor, and at intervals separated by more palaces and temples. Once established here, Akhenaten began a campaign to destroy the very existence of Amun by methodically obliterating every mention of his name on monuments. In view of the immense magical significance attached to names in ancient times, this was an attack of the most serious kind.

The restoration of Amun

Akhenaten reigned for sixteen years, but even before his death there is evidence that his policy had failed. A successor, Smenkhkare, was elevated to the position of co-regent with Akhenaten and sent to live at Thebes, married to the king's eldest surviving daughter. Both disappeared on Akhenaten's death. The real successor was another young man, Tutankhaten, who, after spending two or three years at Amarna, abandoned the city and the Aten cult.

He changed his name to Tutankhamun, and a restoration decree was set up in the temple of Amun at Karnak. He and his suc-

cessor both reigned for a short time, and were followed by a series of military leaders who inaugurated the Nineteenth Dynasty. The name of Akhenaten was expunged from the official king-lists. His city was abandoned and seems to have remained empty and untouched for another fifty years until the great stone temples and palaces were completely demolished to provide cheap building material.

Egypt and the Hittites

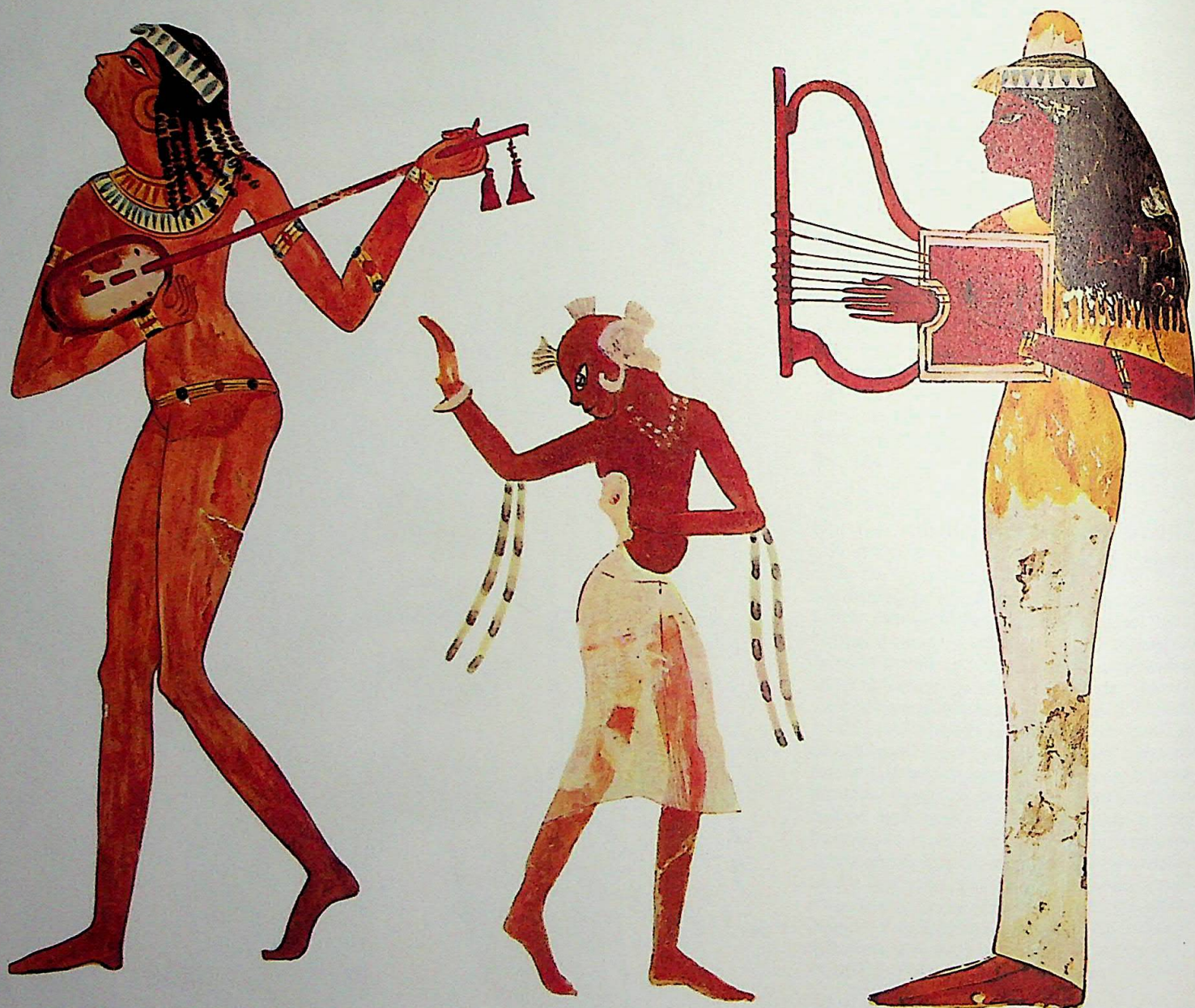
Hittite records from Anatolia show that on the death of an Egyptian king (almost certainly Tutankhamun) his widow, who must have been the young Ankhsenamun, wrote to the Hittite king asking for a son to be sent who should become her husband in preference to an Egyptian. The Hittite king, Suppiluliumas, who was at this time Egypt's chief enemy, delayed while making further enquiries. At last he sent one of his sons, who was however murdered before he had even reached Egypt. In retaliation the Hittites attacked and defeated an Egyptian force. Queen Ankhsenamun's name last appears in association with that of the next Egyptian king, an aging man of military background, which suggests that in the end she had to choose an Egyptian.

The resumption of the imperial age

Outwardly at least the Amarna period left little trace. Thebes remained the great religious capital where the kings were buried and where the additions to the temple of Amun, particularly the great Hypostyle Hall of Kings Seti I and Rameses II, were on an even larger scale than before. However, the military leaders who founded the new Nineteenth Dynasty were not Theban in origin, but appear to have come from the eastern delta. It was here that they built a new capital where, at least from the period of Rameses II, the third king of the dynasty, they resided for much of the time and where many of the great offices of state were situated. The city was called Per-Rameses, 'The house of Rameses', and was probably situated in the area of the modern towns of



The Eighteenth Dynasty ended in a religious revolution instigated by King Akhenaten. He is shown here adoring the sun-god, the Aten, who was intended to replace the principal state god, Amun. Aten was depicted as a sun's disc giving out rays ending in hands. Behind the king stands his wife, Nefertiti. (Stone relief now in the Cairo Museum. Late Eighteenth Dynasty.) Right: a limestone statue probably depicting one of Akhenaten's daughters. (Louvre Museum.)



Right: two female musicians and a dancer from Nubia provide entertainment at a banquet. (Tombs of Djoserkare-seneb and Horemheb. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.) Far right: King Tutankhamun sits on a folding stool pouring a scented liquid into the hand of his queen, Ankhsenamun. (From a small shrine covered with gold leaf, the tomb of Tutankhamun at Thebes. Cairo Museum. Late Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Kantir and Khatana, where remains of a palace and temples have been found over a wide area of cultivated land. This is almost certainly the Biblical Raamses, to the building of which the Israelites appear to have contributed. The king went south to Thebes probably only for the great religious festivals.

The Twentieth Dynasty

A dynastic change about 1200 B.C. brought the Twentieth Dynasty to power. Its second

king, Rameses III, was the last of the great Pharaohs to embellish Thebes with enduring monuments. In his reign, too, the Palestinian empire finally came to an end and his armies now had to fight on Egypt's own boundaries to keep back a hostile incursion from the north by land and sea. For the next fifty years the last eight kings, all called Rameses, must have confined their building projects (the chief means of measuring royal activity) to the delta. With the last king the line of royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings came to an end, marking



the completion also of the New Kingdom, which had begun nearly five centuries earlier with the second Theban revolt.

Priestly rule in Upper Egypt

Even before the death of the last Rameses the shift in the centre of power to the delta led to the division of the country, apparently peacefully, into two provinces. The Twenty-first Dynasty ruled in effect only Lower Egypt, and from a new capital, Tanis, in the far north-eastern corner of the delta. In

Upper Egypt power was vested in the office of high priest of Amun. Just before the end of the Twentieth Dynasty a ruthless struggle for the office of high priest appears to have taken place.

The incumbent, whose father had held the post before him, was expelled and his place taken by a military leader, Herihor, who founded what was in effect a dynasty of high priests controlling Upper Egypt, while the Twenty-first Dynasty ruled in the north. In Upper Egypt, this new arrangement was hailed as 'The Renaissance'.

Libyans in Egypt

During the New Kingdom colonies of Libyans sprang up in the western delta. Under the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties military expeditions had been undertaken against them to prevent their further settlement in Egypt, and even at Thebes their presence was felt. Some adopted Egyptian culture, and even became priests in Egyptian temples, notably at Herakleopolis. Eventually, around 945 B.C., one of their leaders, Sheshonk I, declared





himself king, and appears to have brought about the end of Upper Egyptian independence. He also probably began one of the last great additions to the Karnak temple. However, the kings of this Twenty-second Dynasty were merely the most successful of the Libyan chiefs, and towards the end of the dynasty Lower Egypt seems to have largely split up into provinces under the control of various Libyan chiefs. Their hold over Upper Egypt was also tenuous.

The son of one of the kings, who had been made high priest of Amun, was faced by rebellion at Thebes itself. Eventually Thebes produced a short-lived dynasty of its own, the Twenty-third, whose monuments did not extend outside the city. With the country divided, Egypt was a tempting prey for invasion.

Egypt's influence on Africa

Although Egypt lies across the land routes between Africa and western Asia, there was apparently no through-traffic in ancient times. The routes from both continents led to Egypt, but not beyond. Nevertheless, knowledge of some of the most important steps to settled, civilised life had managed to filter through from western Asia and to emerge and spread out over the African hinterland. These were the domestication of cereals and of certain animals, which enabled essentially hunting communities to become more settled and diversified. Knowledge of this sort, perhaps originating in the Kurdish foothills, had spread to Palestine by about 6500 B.C., and thence to Egypt.

The earliest stages are badly documented in Egypt, probably because the communities were concentrated on the flood plain. The earliest settled communities which have left abundant remains are already at an advanced stage of development, out of which grew the civilisation of Pharaonic Egypt. From Egypt knowledge spread in two directions: westwards along the Mediterranean coast and southwards up the Nile valley into the Sudan.

One site near Khartoum has yielded evidence of a domesticated goat possibly as early as 4000 B.C., and 1,000 years later sheep and oxen were being raised in Kenya, although in southern Africa these advances had to await the Iron Age of the first millennium A.D. However, apart from this indirect transmission of ideas on agri-

A deputation from Nubia at the court of King Tutankhamun. On the far right are sons of the vassal princes of Nubia, then come two servants carrying tribute in the form of gold rings and a bag of gold dust, leopard skins and giraffe tails. In the rear is a Nubian princess wearing an ostrich feather parasol in her head-dress and riding in an ox-drawn chariot. (Tomb of Huy, Viceroy of Kush, Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

culture, the effect of Egyptian civilisation on Africa was small, and limited virtually to the north and central Sudan. Although geographically part of Africa, culturally Egypt belonged to western Asia.

Egypt and western Asia

Culture and trade

The possibility of the spread of cultural influence from western Asia to Egypt during the late prehistoric period must be considered. In art experiments were taking place which were to lead to the development of the rules governing the Pharaonic art style. Cylinder seals of a Mesopotamian type from this period have been found in Egypt, together with other objects bearing pictures in an artistic style which seems to belong to southern Mesopotamia. It is also possible that a particular style of brick architecture, of which examples have survived from the First Dynasty onwards, may be derived from Mesopotamia.

Something more important than simply commercial exchange seems to have been involved, since, to judge from the distribution of Egyptian objects, Egyptian trade appears to have been largely limited to Palestine. However, the evidence for Mesopotamian influence does not amount to a foreign invasion, and if Mesopotamian craftsmen were living in Egypt, one cannot guess what sort of political arrangements made this feasible. However, there is also the possibility that the idea of writing phonetically, already practised in southern Mesopotamia at this period, was transmitted to Egypt.

Links with Palestine

The other great civilisations of the ancient Near East were separated from Egypt by Palestine, a land which supported a collection of city-states of varying degrees of independence and with little political cohesion. They seem rarely to have afforded a real military threat to Egypt and there is little evidence of Egyptian conquest and control until the Eighteenth Dynasty. At all times there must have been regular intercourse between the eastern delta and southern Palestine by way of the road which runs across northern Sinai, and some of the seaports on the Palestine coast played a vital role in trading with Egypt.

The most valuable commodity was timber from the cedar forests which clothed the hills of Lebanon, for Egypt was poor in good-quality timber. Byblos seems to have been the chief centre for this trade, and in the court of the princes of Byblos Egyptian culture became fashionable. Towards the end of the Twelfth Dynasty their tombs contained not only gifts from the Egyptian kings, but also locally made items of royal regalia in Egyptian style. They had scarab-shaped seals made bearing their names and their title, 'Prince of Byblos', written in Egyptian hieroglyphs. An Egyptian colony grew up there, served by a special temple devoted to the Egyptian goddess 'Hathor, Lady of Byblos.' A further source of wealth lay in the inhospitable southern part of the Sinai Peninsula. There diligent search by Egyptian expeditions could locate veins of turquoise and of copper ore. It was an arduous task, made more difficult by the threat of harassment from local tribesmen.

The safety of the expeditions was entrusted to 'Hathor, Lady of the Turquoise', who was given a crude temple in a grotto at one of the main camping sites. Here leaders of successful expeditions left thanksgiving memorials before returning to Egypt.

The conquest of Palestine

From time immemorial the eastern delta was subject to raids from tribesmen from just over the border, and in the early Twelfth Dynasty a fortress, 'The Walls of the Ruler', had been built to discourage such action. However, the success of the Hyksos rulers appears to have prompted the Thebans, who eventually expelled them, to far more vigorous action against Palestine.

The ensuing conquest aroused the suspicions of more powerful countries—at first Mitanni, across the River Euphrates, and later the Hittites in Asia Minor. Not only did they encourage rebellion in the Palestinian city-states but also supported them with military contingents. In retaliation against Mitanni the armies of the Eighteenth Dynasty campaigned as far as the Euphrates, and occasionally even crossed it. However, the area to which permanent claim was laid was mainly confined to Palestine.

Under the rudimentary system of control which the Egyptians set up the local princes were allowed to remain, subject to the taking of an oath of loyalty, and to agreeing to measures such as the education in Egypt of their sons, who would eventually return to inherit their fathers' position. The limited amount of evidence available suggests a possible division of the area into three provinces, each under the charge of an Egyptian official, but the chief burden of





government probably still rested with the native princes. The purpose of this empire was simply the prevention of a build-up of hostile forces on Egypt's borders. It also became increasingly a source of tribute. In fact the empire brought the Egyptians little peace. Palestine was held only by constant military campaigns or displays of force.

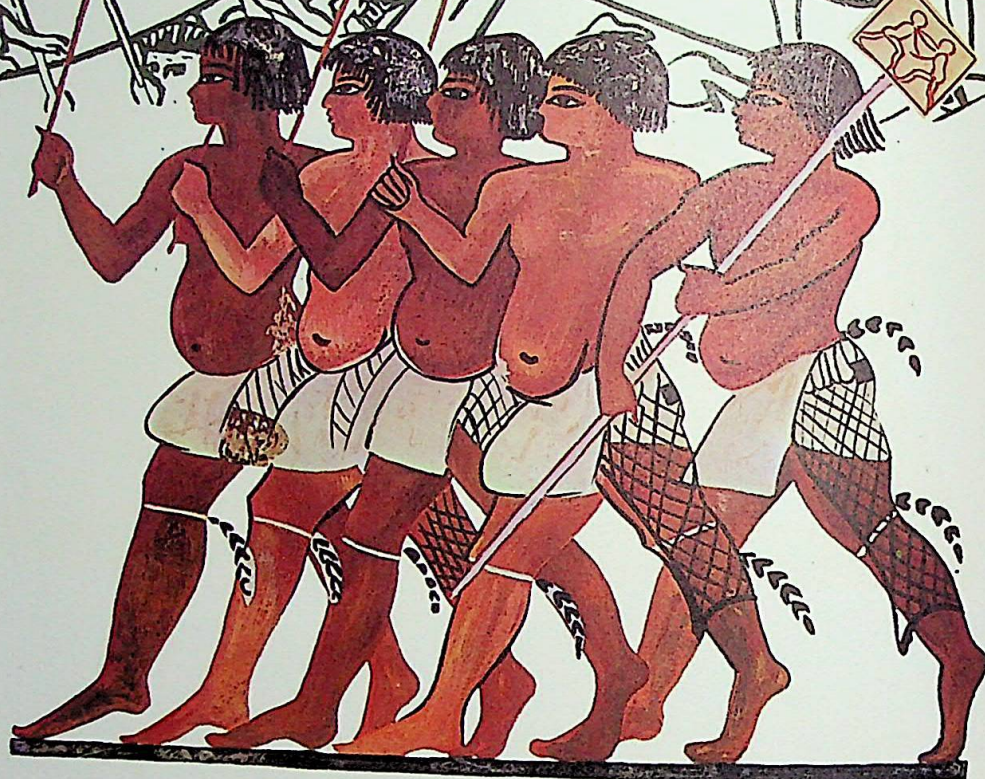
During Akhenaten's reign, when a crisis occurred in Egypt itself, most of the coast of Lebanon and Syria was lost, through the perfidy of the most powerful Syrian prince, who allied himself with the Hittites.

Left: Syrian envoys make supplication to Pharaoh. (Tomb of Sebek-hetep, Thebes, Eighteenth Dynasty.) The Pharaoh depicted is actually Ramesses II, represented by a colossal limestone statue at Memphis. In his reign the hostility between Egypt and the Hittites was brought to an end by a treaty after the indecisive battle at Kadesh. The Hittite copy, on a small clay tablet, is shown on the far left. Below: Ramesses II's principal queen, Nefertari, from a statue at her husband's temple at Abu Simbel in Lower Nubia.





Above right: a section of the naval battle with an Egyptian ship. (Mortuary temple of Rameses III. Thebes, Medinet Habu. Twentieth Dynasty.)



Foreign influences on Egypt

The acquisition of an empire inevitably had some effect on Egyptian culture. Commodities of foreign origin found their way into the country in far greater numbers than ever before. One notable aspect of this was the large-scale import of opium from Cyprus in specially made flasks. The tactics of the army were revolutionised by the adoption of new ideas from western Asia. Palestinian gods and goddesses achieved a limited popularity, a process no doubt begun by the Hyksos, and furthered by the prisoners of war and hostages kept in Egypt. Unfamiliar-sounding foreign words passed into Egyptian speech. Egypt's impact on Palestine was, however, probably just as great, although more difficult to measure in view of the scarcity of written sources. It can be seen particularly clearly in art, notably in the very obvious Egyptian inspiration for the ivory carvings from Megiddo of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries B.C., with their winged, human-headed sphinxes.

Methods of warfare

Before the Eighteenth Dynasty, the equipment of the armies of Egypt was comparatively rudimentary. Consisting entirely of infantry, stiffened with mercenaries from the Nubian peoples living to the south, the Egyptian forces fought chiefly with spears, bows and flint- or bone-tipped arrows and wooden clubs, with perhaps an occasional copper or bronze battleaxe of simple design.

These weapons would no doubt have continued to be sufficient for dealing with recalcitrant Nubians, but the military adventures of the Eighteenth Dynasty and

later required a much greater degree of sophistication to succeed against the armies of western Asia. In response to this a professional army, well organised and equipped, under professional officers led by the king himself, was formed. Weapons were improved and diversified, the Egyptians borrowing ideas extensively from their opponents. The horse-drawn chariot was introduced and was used in the Theban revolt against the Hyksos. The chariots were light, mobile fighting platforms, which probably prepared the way for the infantry by harrying and perhaps even charging the enemy.

Egyptian diplomacy

However, war was not the only instrument of policy. A diplomacy as devious as any of later ages was practised. This is clearly shown by the chance preservation of diplomatic correspondence found at Amarna.

The correspondence is written on little clay tablets in cuneiform, the official diplomatic language of the ancient Near East at this period. Most are letters from the supposedly loyal city-states of Palestine. They protest their loyalty to Pharaoh in beseeching, sycophantic terms and attempt to win favour by accusing their neighbours of treachery.

Sympathetic magic

To these practical expressions of diplomacy the Egyptians added sympathetic magic, as shown in a group of objects, mostly dating from the Twelfth and perhaps Thirteenth Dynasties. They are either pottery vessels or statuettes of bound captives inscribed with lists of foreign peoples and their princes, identified by name and divided into three groups: Nubians, Asians and Libyans. At an appropriate ceremony it was intended that a formula would be recited over them and the

Below: a group of Syrian merchant ships arriving to trade on the quayside at Thebes. (Tomb of Kenamun. Thebes, no. 162. Eighteenth Dynasty.)



Egyptian aspirations to an empire in Palestine were finally ended through an invasion of Syria and the Palestinian coast by 'Peoples of the Sea' migrating from the islands and shores of the northern Mediterranean. Among them were the Philistines. Their movement was checked only by a land and sea battle on the frontiers of Egypt, during the reign of Rameses III.

Left: a troop of Nubian mercenaries armed with rods and carrying a standard with the name of their unit, 'The Wrestlers.' The leather net with a patch over the seat is a protective dress peculiar to naval personnel, indicating that they are perhaps marines. (Tomb of Theneny. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

pottery vessels broken, or the statuettes buried. By this means any hostile actions or thoughts would immediately be brought to nothing.

Egypt and Africa

Trade with the south

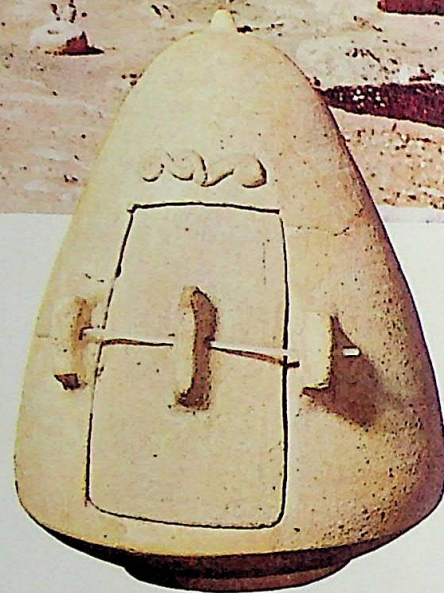
South of Aswan, the first 250 miles of the Nile valley, called Lower Nubia, is a poor land agriculturally and has rarely supported a ruler of sufficient power to have seriously threatened Egypt. Its value lay in mineral resources which the Egyptians exploited: gold, mined in the Red Sea hills and probably panned in riverine deposits, and copper.

The rich civilisation of Egypt also provided an attractive market for exotic luxury goods from lands further to the south: ebony, ivory, incense, the skins of rare animals, and sometimes the animals themselves, such as giraffes. Even in the Old Kingdom military expeditions were sent as far as the Second

Cataract, doubtless to ensure the safety of mining and quarrying expeditions, and at least one permanent Egyptian outpost was established near this limit. One of its purposes was probably to trade with caravans bringing these goods from the far south. Towards the end of the period its function appears to have been replaced by donkey caravans sent from Egypt to trade at a native town even further to the south.

The kingdom of Kush

In the Twelfth Dynasty the control of Lower Nubia was by a much more elaborately conceived military presence. A chain of mighty, impregnable, mud-brick fortresses was erected between the First and Second Cataracts, and at Semna, at the southern end of the Second Cataract, a strict frontier control was brought into operation, with a special fortified trading zone under Egyptian surveillance. The reason for these precautions appears to have been the growth of potentially hostile native kingdoms to the



Above: a pottery vessel of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries B.C. from Ras Shamra, a port on the Syrian coast. Its form recalls the shape of conical houses which can still be seen in the Syrian countryside.

south, their wealth perhaps initially derived from trade with Egypt. The climax came when the Egyptians withdrew and the Hyksos came to power. One powerful united kingdom of Kush seems to have taken control of Lower Nubia and to have established friendly diplomatic relations with the Hyksos, thus posing a threat to the ambitious Thebans squeezed between them.

The capital of this kingdom has been located at Kerma, south of the Third Cataract where these kings were buried in huge circular mounds, surrounded by sacrificed retainers, sometimes numbering hundreds. As at Byblos, contact with Egypt stimulated an interest in Egyptian fashions, and a hybrid culture developed. There were even Egyptians in the service of these kings. It was with the help of mercenary soldiers from Nubia that the Thebans finally expelled the Hyksos.

Egypt's southward penetration

The Theban success against the Hyksos and the subsequent invasion of Palestine was matched in the south by a similar attack on the Kingdom of Kush and an invasion which took the Egyptian armies to distant reaches

of the Nile valley far beyond their earlier frontiers, down to Kurgus beyond the Fourth Cataract. Again a rudimentary form of control was set up with a viceroy of Kush in overall charge. Some minor princes of Lower Nubia were allowed to remain in power, but the Kingdom of Kush, after at least one rebellion, seems to have been finally destroyed.

The effect of conquest was that local cultures soon largely died out. For a time Egyptian culture seems to have been adopted wholesale, no doubt encouraged by the founding of Egyptian colonies with their own temples, such as that of Rameses II at Abu Simbel, rivalling the temples of Egypt itself. However, this culture disappears leaving an archaeological gap which is presumably the sign of general impoverishment.

The kingdom of Napata

The decline in Egypt's ability to control a large empire after the Twentieth Dynasty must have meant a withdrawal from Nubia which was to prove permanent, but the records are silent about this. Nevertheless, the period of Egypt's greatest cultural influence in Africa was still to come, the result of a strange episode in history. One of the principal Egyptian cities of Nubia had been Napata, probably situated on the river bank near a prominent hill called Gebel Barkal. A sequence of tombs at a nearby cemetery, dating from a period after the Egyptian withdrawal, seems to have belonged to a line of native kings who now took over and whose culture owed relatively little to the period of Egyptian rule, although the temples of Amun at the foot of Gebel Barkal must have been a constant reminder.

About 730 B.C., one of these kings, Piankhi, adopting the titles and trappings of an Egyptian pharaoh, mounted an invasion against Egypt, now split up under the nominal rule of the Libyan Twenty-second Dynasty. The success of the invasion left this provincial Nubian ruler and his successors kings of all Egypt as well as of their own territory, a position which they held for about seventy years, forming Manetho's Twenty-fifth Dynasty.

Piankhi represented himself as a zealous observer of Egyptian religious practices, and was followed in this by his successors, under whom work was carried out on a number of temples in Egypt. Their tombs continued to be sited near Napata, but were now constructed as pyramids with the dead buried after the Egyptian fashion, although in Egypt no royal pyramids had been built for eight centuries. However, the most remarkable aspect of this period of Napatan rule was the beginning of a revival of art in Egypt, which was to continue under the succeeding dynasties, producing some of the finest works of sculpture ever made in Egypt.



The kingdom of Meroe

The end of Twenty-fifth Dynasty rule came as a result of events outside Egypt. This was the period of Assyrian military expansion and Egypt was still a rich prize. In 671 B.C. the armies of Esarhaddon defeated the Egyptians, entered northern Egypt and annexed it. The Nubian kings made repeated attempts to regain complete control of the country but eventually, in 663, the armies of Assurbanipal ascended the Nile and sacked the city of Thebes. The last Nubian king of Egypt fled back to Napata, but this was not the end of the Napatan kingdom. Its rulers continued to try and maintain a semblance of the court of distant Pharaonic Egypt, although gradually coming more and more under the influence of their own culture.

Eventually the site of the capital and the royal cemetery, still marked by pyramids, was moved further south to Meroe, 150 miles from Khartoum. Meroitic civilisation continued into the fourth century A.D. as a vigorous native culture, still showing at the court level traces of its pretensions to Egyptian culture, although, through the absorption of local influences, its style tended towards a heavy, richly ornamented, baroque Egyptian. Its most impressive

monuments are its temples, dedicated to local gods, with inscriptions still written in hieroglyphs. Two features of this culture call for particular attention. Alone among ancient Egypt's African neighbours it was literate, having developed its own script which, unlike Egyptian, was alphabetic. It has been deciphered, but unfortunately its language cannot yet be translated. Secondly, probably by the middle of the first century B.C., an iron-working industry was being carried on at Meroe, which lies in the vicinity of iron ore deposits. Most probably it was from here that knowledge of this technique spread gradually into central and southern Africa.

The decline of Egypt

It is particularly difficult to give a balanced assessment of the last three centuries of ancient Egyptian history. The centre of political power and probably of cultural life as a whole was in the delta. Although the amount of documentation on daily life reaches formidable proportions, historical data are as scanty as ever. Egypt's importance in the Near East had declined considerably. Occasional forays into Palestine met only with defeat. The Assyrian

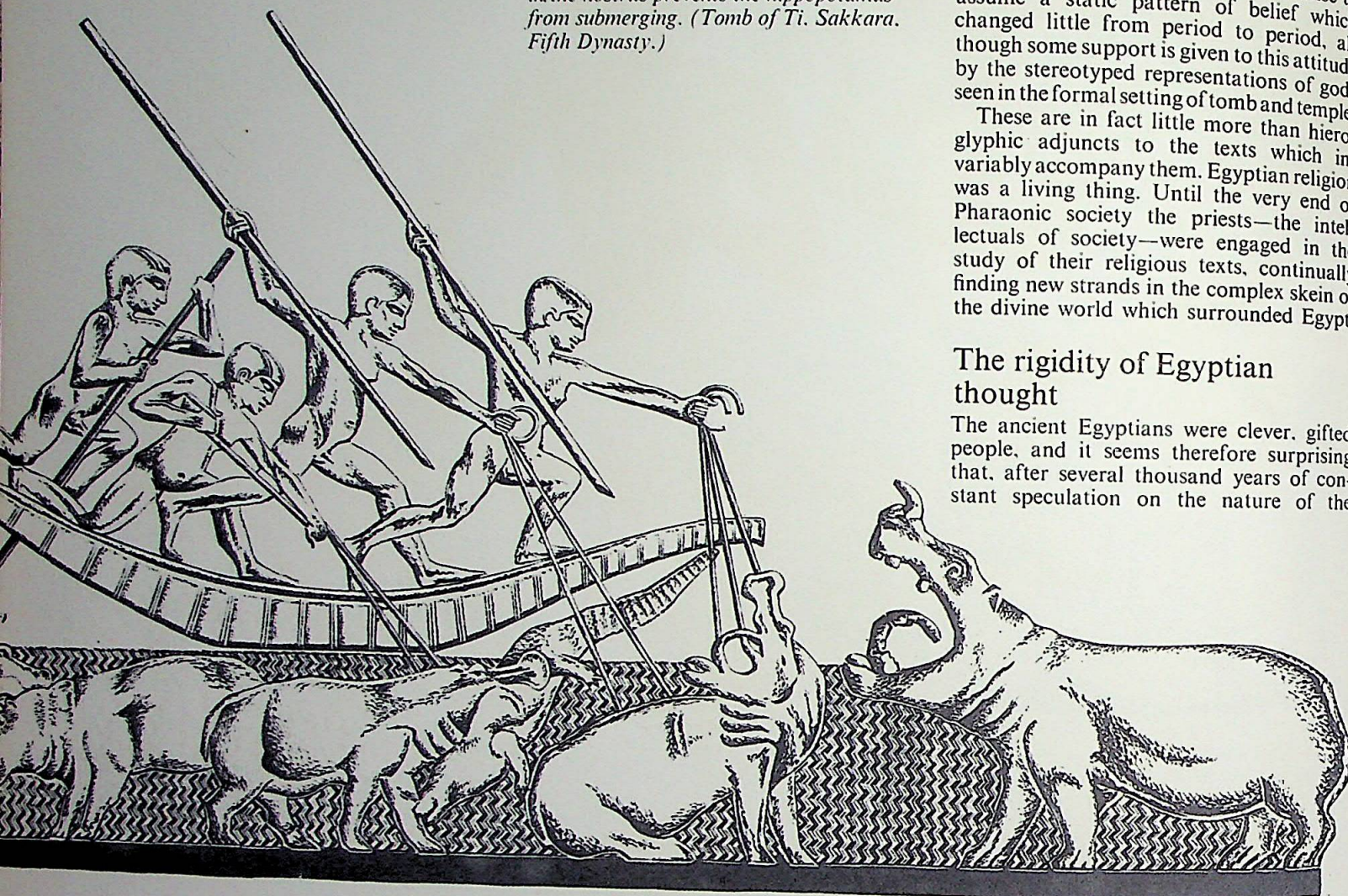
Above: Syrians bring tribute to the court of Pharaoh. Among the items they carry are gold vessels with elaborate fretwork designs. (Tomb of Sebek-hetep. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

invasion was followed in 525 B.C. by one mounted by the Persians, who held Egypt for a century and a quarter. Revolts against foreign rule took place, but without success.

The last fifty years of independence under Manetho's Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth Dynasties, between 404 and 343 B.C., seem to have been possible only because of weakness in the Persian Empire. In 343 the Persians re-established their rule, but were themselves defeated shortly afterwards by Alexander the Great, who entered Egypt in triumph in 332.

Deciding on a date for the end of ancient Egyptian history and civilisation is inevitably an arbitrary matter. History is a continuous process; it is historians who create periods. Certain outward forms of an official or religious nature continued while Egypt was a Roman province. On the other hand, much of the culture which is commonly associated with the ancient Egypt of

Below: a hippopotamus hunt in the marshes. The animal is caught and eventually killed by harpoons with detachable heads. Each harpoon carries a rope, the other end of which remains in the hunter's hand. A strike in the nostrils prevents the hippopotamus from submerging. (Tomb of Ti, Sakkara, Fifth Dynasty.)



Egyptian religion. Apart from the fact that it is now impossible to enter into the state of mind of the ancient Egyptian, the documentation is as uneven as it is for Egyptian history in general. It is, however, unwise to assume a static pattern of belief which changed little from period to period, although some support is given to this attitude by the stereotyped representations of gods seen in the formal setting of tomb and temple. These are in fact little more than hieroglyphic adjuncts to the texts which invariably accompany them. Egyptian religion was a living thing. Until the very end of Pharaonic society the priests—the intellectuals of society—were engaged in the study of their religious texts, continually finding new strands in the complex skein of the divine world which surrounded Egypt.

The rigidity of Egyptian thought

The ancient Egyptians were clever, gifted people, and it seems therefore surprising that, after several thousand years of constant speculation on the nature of the

the Pharaohs had undergone profound changes centuries earlier. The date which conveniently serves as an end point is the defeat of the last native Egyptian ruler, Nekht-hor-heb, by the Persians in 343 B.C.

A cultural revival

In Upper Egypt Thebes remained the principal city. Its vast bewildering complex of temples included many which were now nearly a thousand years old—monuments to an imperial splendour that had long since departed. Even the kings of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, who appear to have achieved some stature as rulers after the Assyrian withdrawal, made only negligible additions. The fact that Upper Egypt appears to have slowly reverted to provincialism may be partly responsible for the feeling of decline which the period induces. Nevertheless, the artistic works of the period belong not to the end of a great civilisation, nor even to a tired academic revival, but represent a

vigorous new approach, which in portrait sculpture created masterly studies.

This artistic revival came at a moment, when contacts between Egypt and Greece were being made. The Greeks who were being attracted to Egypt were mostly merchants and mercenary soldiers, but there were also some of a more scholarly frame of mind, who were deeply impressed by the great antiquity of Egyptian civilisation, and particularly by the size and style of its monumental stone buildings and sculpture. It was in the contemplation of these that Greek artists seem to have felt the inspiration which was to produce the architecture and sculpture of Classical Greece.

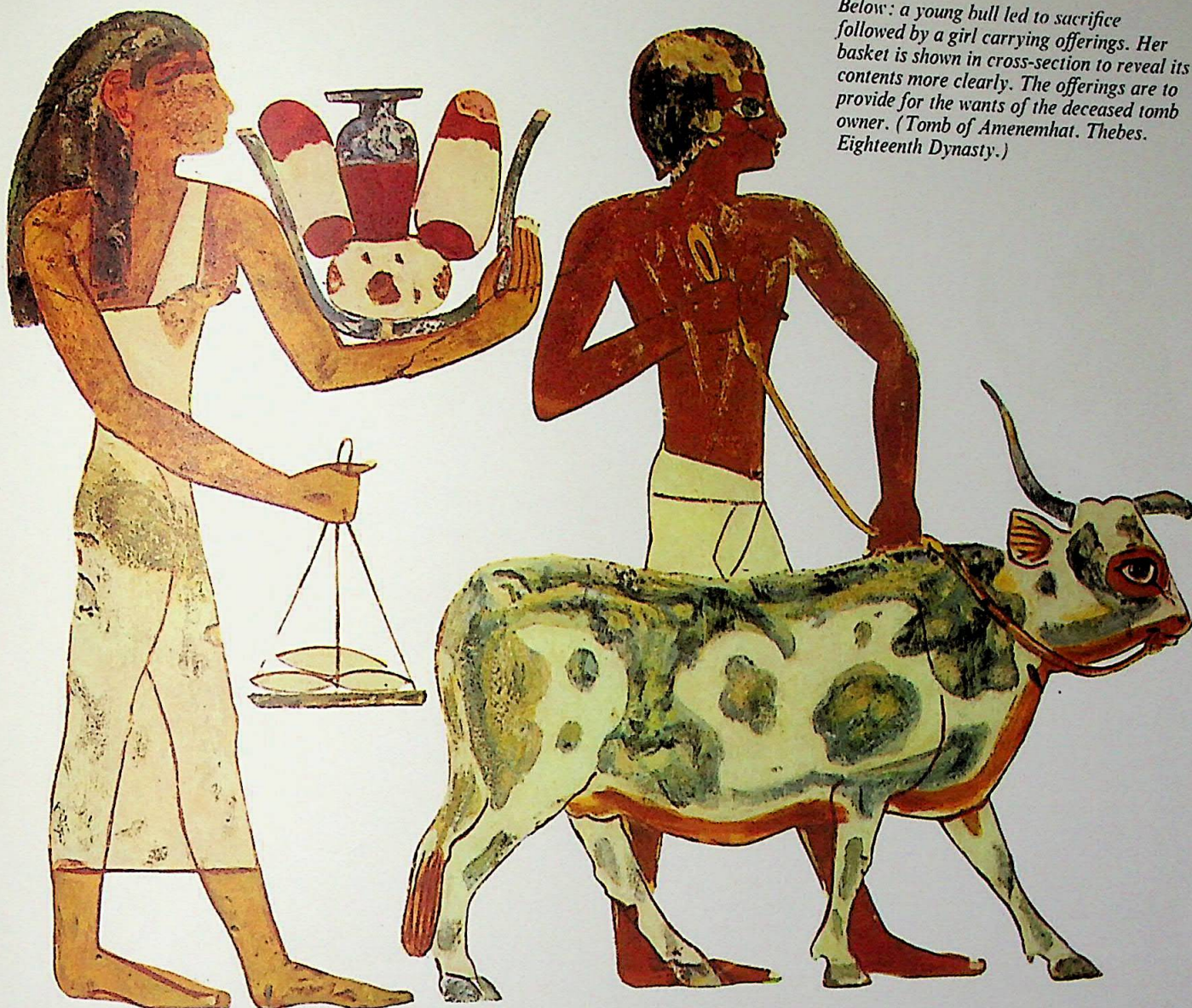
The religion of Egypt

Religion in ancient Egypt was not simply a matter of communication between men and remote gods. The entire world was the outward aspect of a complex divine order. It is not easy to make an intelligible survey of

universe by the most intelligent members of society, they should have produced so little of any value.

The answer lies in the Egyptian's unquestioning acceptance of certain assumptions, on which all their reasoning was based. They assumed that the universe was governed by forces which were essentially personal, and thus subject to the same whims and irregularities of conduct as the human beings whom they were thought closely to resemble. This belief precluded natural, impersonal laws whose results could be predicted.

The representation of the universe painted on the ceiling in the tomb of Rameses VI about 1130 B.C. illustrates this view. The sky goddess, Nut, a naked woman with stars painted on her belly, bends over the earth. At one end the sun, held up by a winged beetle, is born from her womb. Four jackals who protect the eastern horizon stand in adoration: 'It is they who cause the sun-god to appear and who open the doors in the four gates of the eastern horizon of



Below: a young bull led to sacrifice followed by a girl carrying offerings. Her basket is shown in cross-section to reveal its contents more clearly. The offerings are to provide for the wants of the deceased tomb owner. (Tomb of Amenemhat, Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

heaven.' From here the sun, now a hawk-headed man, sails in a boat across the heavenly river beneath Nut's body. Finally, in the evening, he is swallowed by the goddess while the king watches in adoration and thus 'causes the barge of the sun-god to return in peace.' In another part of the tomb the same sun-god is the focal point of a legend where he appears as an old man, angry at mankind whom he has created and who now plots rebellion against him. Imprisoned within this mental framework of a non-mechanical universe, accepting without question the validity of ancient documents, the Egyptians were doomed to pursue a course of thought which, while it grew broader and more elaborately patterned at every step, ultimately led nowhere.

The use of imagery

If the Egyptians were conditioned to seeing natural phenomena in these terms how did they set about building them up into the

complex systems which represented divine reality? Their method was one which accepted metaphor as a valid process of argument. The sun crossed the sky slowly and steadily, a mode of travel which readily suggested voyaging on the Nile. For the ancient Egyptian this obvious metaphor was clear proof of how the sun-god actually travelled.

With this inclination towards vivid, concrete imagery the Egyptian then went on to give the boat its exact form, with two steering oars called 'Perception' and 'Command', supplied with a crew of other gods including a pilot with sounding rod, and a troop of lesser divinities to haul the boat along from the bank. Hazards to navigation were described, suitably magnified to become attacks by terrible demons, who in turn needed to be repulsed by spells and by other friendly beings. In this way a whole system of mythology was carefully built up by the Egyptians from the acceptance of the initial metaphor.

Universal order

The Egyptians were also eager to fit these individual revelations into a universal scheme. By a careful exegesis of the texts stored in temple archives which recorded the revelations of past ages, and by adding their own insights and explanations, they attempted to discover the mystic relationships which were assumed to exist between one god and another, and to interweave the various legends of which they formed part. In doing this they accepted the mystic nature of coincidence. Even similarity in sound between two words—a pun—indicated an underlying connection. This process, essentially a written and scholarly one, led them far in the direction of seeing every god simply as an aspect of every other god. It produced composite deities such as 'Osiris-Apis-Atum-Horus in one, the great god', a Nineteenth-Dynasty designation for the sacred Apis bull of Sakkara. This might appear to be only one step away from belief in a single



universal god. However, as with the sacred hieroglyphic script, simplicity held no attraction and complexity was considered a sign of profundity. Given the Egyptians' process of reasoning, what seem to be blatant contradictions were to them tokens of the mysterious, many-sided nature of the divine world, to be explained by the most elaborate and far-fetched interpretations.

The limit of simplicity and abstraction was reached with the Memphite theology, which may go as far back as the Old Kingdom. It describes the role of the Memphite god, Ptah, as the spiritual creator of the universe and the prime-mover of life:

'He is in every body and in every mouth, of all gods, and of all mankind, of all beasts, of all creeping things, and of [everything] that lives, thinking and commanding whatever he wishes. . . . Indeed, all the divine order came into being through what [his] heart devised and what [his] tongue commanded.'

The service of the gods

The point of contact with the gods was in the temples of Egypt. Many of the gods and goddesses were associated with specific localities, often survivals from an early period when their patronage was limited to a specific village community. The priests attached to a local cult tended to provide their own particular interpretation of the divine scheme centred on their own temple and its deity. This process was aided by the fact that from an early date most deities had to some extent been reduced to equal terms

by being cast in human shape. Even if a god had originated as a sacred animal, his animal head was set on top of a human body.

Gods could therefore easily be arranged in patterns reflecting ancient Egyptian society, the most common being a triad of husband, wife and son. Thus a temple would serve not only the original god of the locality but others, who could be regarded as guests. Despite this parochialism there is normally no trace of hostility between one theological centre and another. Geographical diversity was merely a further element of the divine mystery.

The design of the temples

The temple was primarily the home of the statue-images in which the gods dwelt. Its architecture to some extent reflected that of Egyptian upper-class mansions, with shady, colonnaded courts, and columned halls masking secluded private quarters at the rear. Unlike the houses of mortals, however, it was, wherever possible, built of stone to last for eternity. Its design also had to take into account the processions which played an important part in the ritual. Temples were usually built on one major axis facing the processional road which led down to a canal or the Nile, since some festivals entailed the visit of divine images to other temples. The stone walls of the temples were also used to record pictorial summaries of the main elements in the temple ritual, and on the outside sometimes scenes of the divine king triumphant over foreign foes.

All were given an existence of their own by



a ceremony, the 'Opening of the Mouth', which was probably repeated annually. In this way the service of the gods and the safety of Egypt were ensured for eternity, even if human participation should cease. The design of the temple inevitably became the subject of symbolic association. The monumental gateway into the temple, between two high, oblong towers called pylons, became a representation of a mountainous horizon, with a central pass where the rising sun would first appear to light up the interior of the temple. The whole building was charged with divine energy, latent within the very fabric of its walls.

The ritual of the temples

The temples provided the gods with dwellings suited to their superhuman nature, but, once present in the temples, they still needed regular attention to ensure their continued benevolence. This was achieved chiefly by a daily ritual, in essence a dramatisation of daily human life. At dawn the doors of the sanctuary were opened, to the accompaniment of the chanting of a hymn of adoration. The priest entered, dressed the statue and purified it, and presented a selection of offerings of food and drink. At night a similar ritual was performed in reverse. Prayers, purification and food offerings were the main features of temple ritual, to which might be added music provided by the priestesses and the burning of incense.

In return the god was expected to behave in a reasonably benevolent manner. One king addresses the god Osiris:

'And thou shalt double for me the long duration of the great reign of King Rameses, the great god. Certainly the benefactions

which I have conferred on thy house . . . in the past four years are many compared to what King Rameses, the great god, conferred in his sixty-seven years . . . Besides thou art the one who hast said it with thine own mouth, and it cannot be upset'.

The priests

In theory the king was the only person who communicated with the gods: he alone appears in the scenes of ritual on the temple walls. However, in practice this function had to be delegated to priests.

The sole qualification of a priest seems to have been ritual purity of the body while present in the temple, achieved mainly by bathing in ritually purified water. There was no special priestly class of society, and indeed, particularly in early periods, it appears to have been a task often performed by officials together with their other administrative duties, although it carried with it a specific title. The main task was serving the god, but there were other duties of a scholarly or administrative kind, although little is known about exact divisions of labour.

In addition to the study of documents in the archives there would also have been instruction for novices, and probably schools where the art of writing was taught, as well as the closely related discipline of line drawing. Each temple was at the centre of an economic unit which, in the case of a great state temple, could be one of the wealthiest in the land.

The keeping of flocks of fowl was an important activity on many estates.

Top left: an aged 'chief of fowlers' tending a flock of pelicans, once common in the Nile Valley. Their eggs, although painted as if lying on top, were stored inside pottery bowls and kept fresh and cool by a covering of grass. (Tomb of Horemheb, Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Below: peasants delivering their quota of geese, which are being packed into crates. (From a tomb at Thebes and now in the British Museum. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

The wealth of the temples

The wealth of the temples was measured in the fields and farms they possessed (in Egypt as well as in foreign provinces), in livestock and perhaps prisoners of war, and also gifts of costly objects and materials from the king. The temple enclosure was filled with storehouses and granaries and the offices of administrators, and was surrounded by their

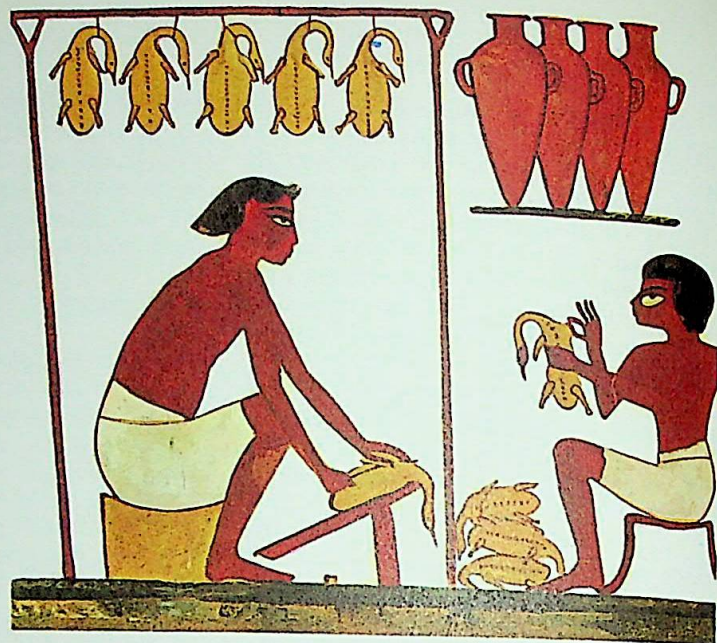


houses. In later times the temples even played a part in internal trade, and the resources of materials and craftsmen which were in their possession must have meant that workshops and factories were also under their control.

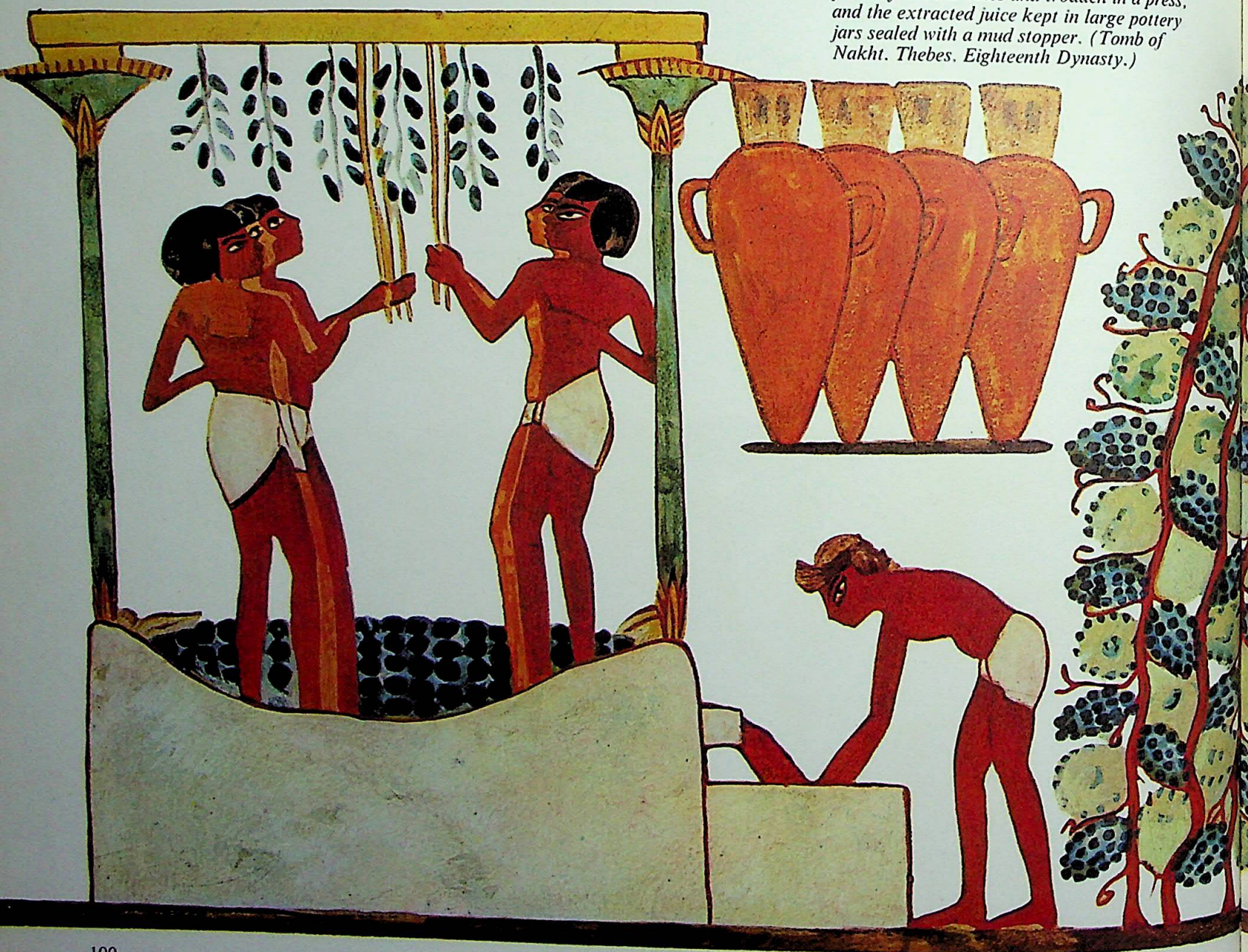
All this wealth belonged to the god and the offerings which were presented to him were merely the tokens of the total produce of the god's estate. These offerings might then be presented to statues of other resident divinities, to the spirits of departed kings and to honoured private individuals represented by a statue. The estate's produce

Scenes from country life provided a suitably happy and prosperous background for the life of the tomb owner's spirit in the hereafter.

Above right: wild fowl being plucked, cleaned and dried in the sun. Later they were packed inside two-handed pottery jars.



Below: the grape harvest. The grapes were picked from the vines and trodden in a press, and the extracted juice kept in large pottery jars sealed with a mud stopper. (Tomb of Nakht, Thebes, Eighteenth Dynasty.)



also paid for the priesthood and on occasions for other undertakings too, such as royal tomb construction. The temples were thus at the centre of the country's economic life.

The religion of Akhenaten

Egyptian religion also contained a political element. The success of the Theban princes was reflected on the divine plane by their god, Amun, becoming 'king of the gods'. The politics of the Theban kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty were intimately linked with him, and presumably with his priesthood. His statue became the oracle for ratifying major state decisions. It is characteristic of the times that the reaction to this took the form of a religious 'revolution'.

For inspiration Akhenaten drew heavily on concepts entirely native to Egypt. Sun worship was of great importance even in the Old Kingdom, and its growing popularity can be seen at Thebes during the Eighteenth Dynasty. Amun himself was identified with the old sun-god Re. Even the name Aten was an old term for the sun's disc, though Akhenaten now depicted Aten as a disc, from which long rays ending in hands emanated.

The most striking departure in Akhenaten's religion was its assault on the position of the great Theban god, Amun. The attack was not only destructive; it sought also to take over part of Amun's nature. Already in the Eighteenth Dynasty Amun, as Amun-Re, had been the subject of poetic composi-

tions in which he appeared as the sole creator of life, whose daily presence in the sky as the sun-god, Re, brought happiness and life to all living things. The new hymn to the Aten develops the same themes, but with considerably more poetic inspiration. It is no reflection on Akhenaten's sincerity about his religion to say that all this was intended to achieve one end: a change in the relationship between the king and the principal god of the Egyptian state. Although the king is constantly shown worshipping his god there was a clear attempt to give them equality.

The Aten was given a set of titles as if it were a king and these titles often appear alongside those of Akhenaten as an object of worship. As if to emphasise this partnership the Aten celebrated festivals of a kind usually



associated with kingship. This co-regency between king and god presumably restored the kingship to a more healthy status.

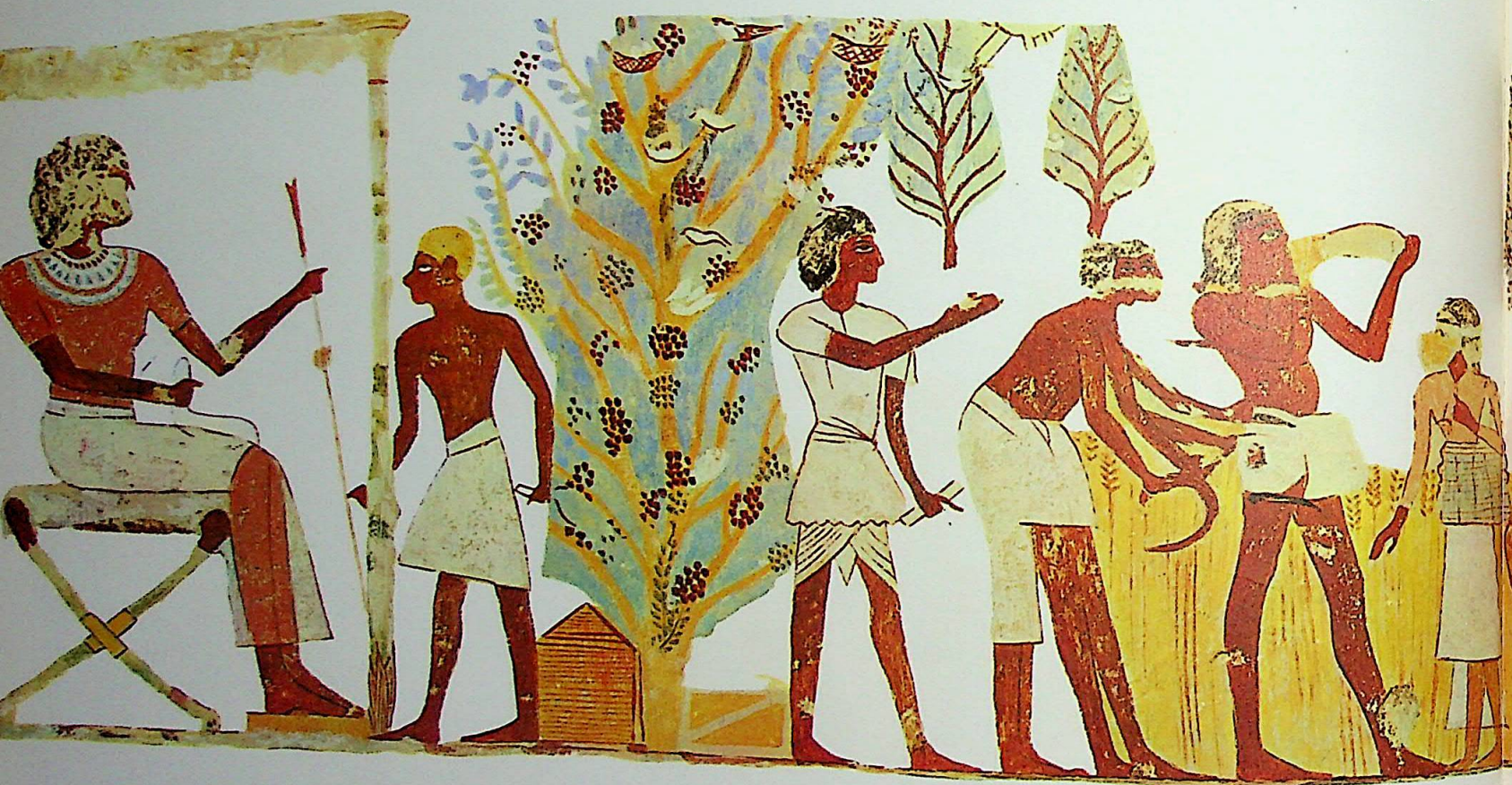
This improved status was reflected in the tombs of the courtiers, which were now filled with scenes, probably derived from the Aten temples, showing the king worshipping, riding through the city, rewarding loyal courtiers and sitting with his family. However, Aten religion had little appeal, or indeed, little relevance to the common people. Objects excavated from a workmen's village at Amarna belong only to

time-honoured household cults.

Akhenaten's lack of attention to the affairs of empire is understandable in view of his domestic preoccupations. Pacifism was not part of his creed, as scenes of the king in the traditional pose of smiting captives are now known. The Amarna 'revolution' was about kingship. Its failure was presumably the result of the extreme measures which he took. Perhaps the non-Theban military leaders who eventually took over the kingship were better placed to combat whatever influences Akhenaten had been fighting.

The religion of the common people

The temples were not places of popular worship. Their sanctuaries could be entered only by the purified servants of the god. The gods, however, were not altogether remote from the people. Although the great state temples were staffed by high-ranking priests and officials there must have been innumerable small temples and shrines whose cult involved humbler people. In a village occupied by workmen at the necropolis at



Above: Harvesting the corn. Under the supervision of a scribe and watched by the deceased tomb owner, a field of corn is cut with wooden sickles inset with flint blades. One reaper refreshes himself from a pot of water. Two female gleaners accompany the men. (Tomb of Menena. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Left: the tomb owner himself, a workman at a necropolis, ploughing the heavenly fields. (Tomb of Sen-nedjem. Thebes. Nineteenth Dynasty.)

Right: corn being carried from the field by a reluctant donkey. (Tomb of Panehsy. Thebes. Nineteenth Dynasty.)



Thebes the priesthood of their patron god, the deified King Amenhetep I, was composed of certain of the workmen themselves.

However, even the exalted state gods were not locked away permanently in the depths of their giant temples. Festivals were held throughout the year, marked by public holidays, when a portable image of the god would be carried out of the temple for a procession to other shrines. These were occasions for public rejoicing and feasting and perhaps an opportunity to present a petition to the god who would signify his

answer by transmitting movements through the bearers of his statue.

This practice of consulting a god's statue as an oracle, known from the Eighteenth Dynasty onwards, covered all aspects of life: 'Should I accept this bull?', 'Will I be blamed?', 'Will they mention me to the vizier?'. Even Amun himself was not completely beyond the reach of someone like a Theban draughtsman who prayed in this fashion: 'Thou art Amun, lord of the silent man, who comest at the voice of the poor man. I call to thee when I am in distress and

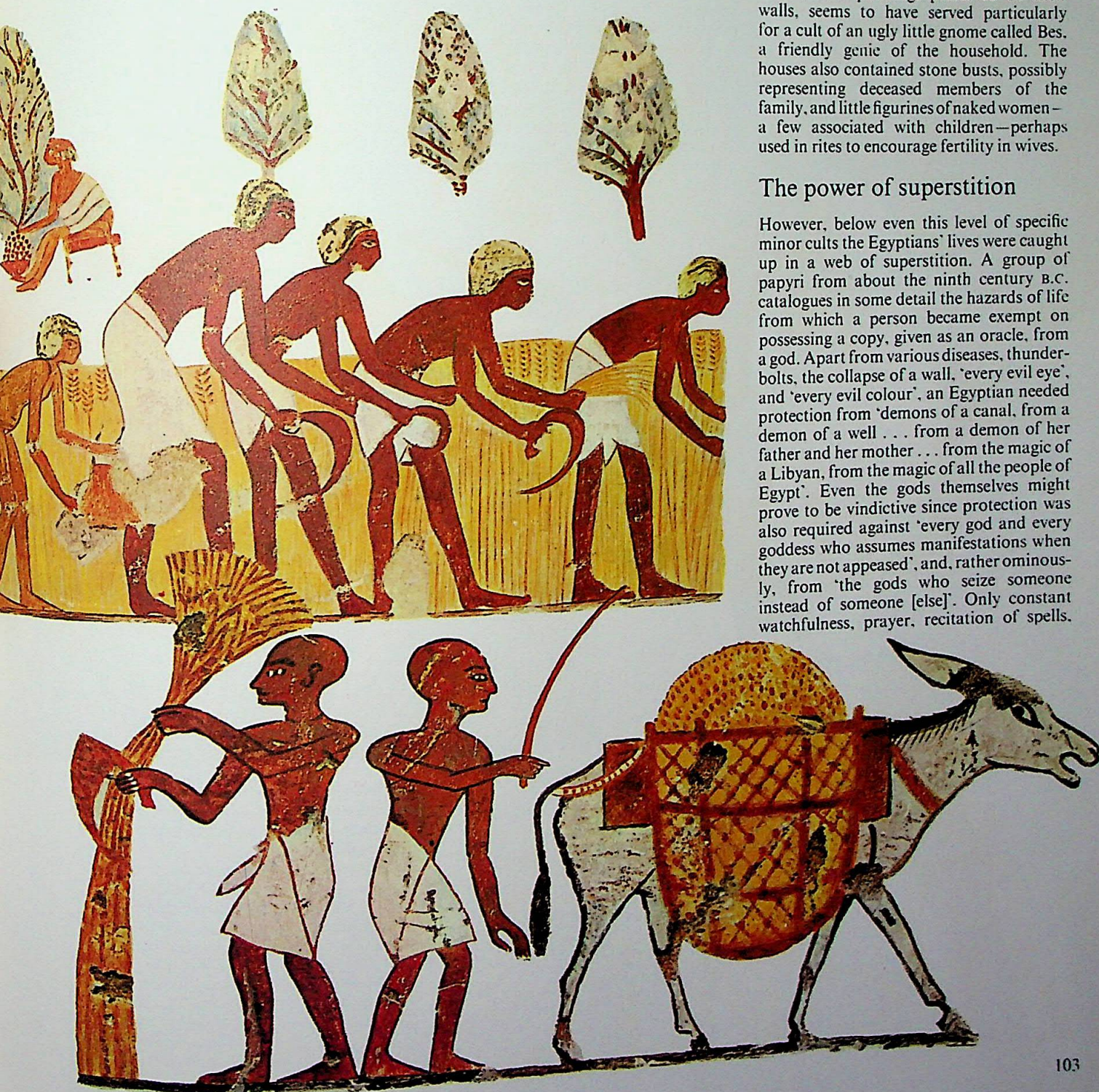
thou comest and rescuest me. . . Though a servant is wont to do wrong, still the lord is wont to be merciful. The lord of Thebes does not spend a whole day angry. As for his anger, with the passing of a moment nought remains'.

Household shrines

There were also cults for which the home was the most suitable shrine. The houses of the necropolis workmen at Thebes each contained a special shrine in the front room which, from paintings preserved on their walls, seems to have served particularly for a cult of an ugly little gnome called Bes, a friendly genie of the household. The houses also contained stone busts, possibly representing deceased members of the family, and little figurines of naked women — a few associated with children — perhaps used in rites to encourage fertility in wives.

The power of superstition

However, below even this level of specific minor cults the Egyptians' lives were caught up in a web of superstition. A group of papyri from about the ninth century B.C. catalogues in some detail the hazards of life from which a person became exempt on possessing a copy, given as an oracle, from a god. Apart from various diseases, thunderbolts, the collapse of a wall, 'every evil eye', and 'every evil colour', an Egyptian needed protection from 'demons of a canal, from a demon of a well . . . from a demon of her father and her mother . . . from the magic of a Libyan, from the magic of all the people of Egypt'. Even the gods themselves might prove to be vindictive since protection was also required against 'every god and every goddess who assumes manifestations when they are not appeased', and, rather ominously, from 'the gods who seize someone instead of someone [else]'. Only constant watchfulness, prayer, recitation of spells,





and possession of charms could hope to keep a person safe in this jungle of hostile forces. One could even possess a calendar telling which part of every day of the year was lucky or unlucky.

Religion and medicine

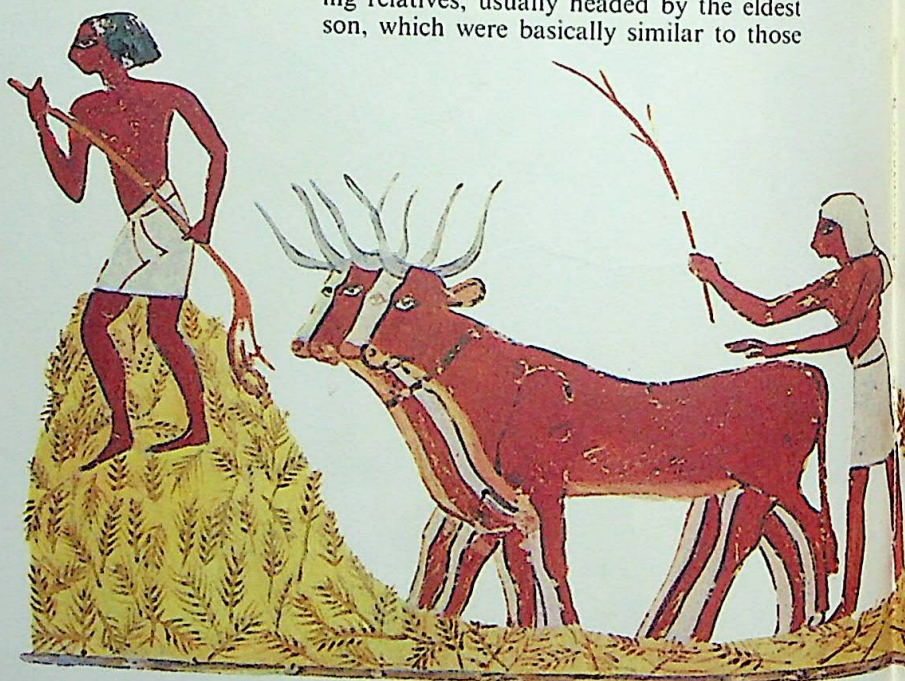
It is to this world of evil spirits that much of Egyptian medicine belongs. Although evidence is occasionally found of a careful diagnosis of an illness, based on close observation, together with fairly rational suggestions for treatment, for most people this approach had little appeal. A course of treatment which grappled with the evil forces causing sickness was far more appropriate. Most medical treatises are a mixture of observation, of folk remedies employing substances like mouse oil and centipede fat, and of pure magic intended to persuade or frighten the possessing demon to leave the body of the ailing person. In the

same treatise there might also be found recipes for removing fleas from the house and the preparation of a cream which, when smeared on the face, 'transforms an old man into a youth. . . . Proved a million times.'

Life after death

The pattern of preservation of ancient remains in Egypt has favoured tombs and cemeteries at the expense of houses and towns. This tends to give a somewhat exaggerated idea of the importance which the preparation for death had among the ancient Egyptians, although funerals and tomb construction must have been a major item of family expenditure.

It was believed that a man's spirit lived on after death and that this existence was comparable to that on earth, with just the same requirements. These were met partly by burying household equipment in the grave, partly by magical substitutes (which might extend to a complete environment for the deceased recorded in pictures showing the highlights of his earthly life), and partly by offering-ceremonies performed by surviving relatives, usually headed by the eldest son, which were basically similar to those



After reaping, the corn is stacked on the threshing floor and oxen are driven round it. Their treading separates the grains from the stalk of the corn.

Left: a lame foreman watches.

Right: after winnowing by tossing it in the air so that the chaff is blown away, the grain which is left behind is scooped up and measured in standard corn measures.

Top right: scribes keep an account of the harvest yield. Even before the harvest began, however, the acreage had been measured, perhaps for taxation purposes, using ropes of given lengths. (From the tomb of Menena. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)



performed in temples. In time this simple belief became caught up in mythological conceptions of the next world, particularly the identification of the deceased with the resurrected god, Osiris. The superstitious dangers which besieged the Egyptian during life also pursued him after death and required the recitation of spells, written on the coffin or on a roll of papyrus.

Spoliation of the dead

The dead were particularly vulnerable to the attentions of the living, who might rob the tomb of its contents, mutilate the pictures of the dead person in the hopes of destroying his heavenly happiness, and even destroy his body, carefully preserved as a home for his spirit either by artificial mummification or by the preservative qualities of dry sand.

The living even blamed the dead for causing trouble, and a number of letters have survived threatening them with legal proceedings before a company of gods. The significance of this was certainly not lost on

the Egyptians: 'Cease not from following your desires until the day of death arrives. Those who have departed since the time of the god, they have not come back again. . . . They experience not the pleasure of their desires.'

Egyptian art

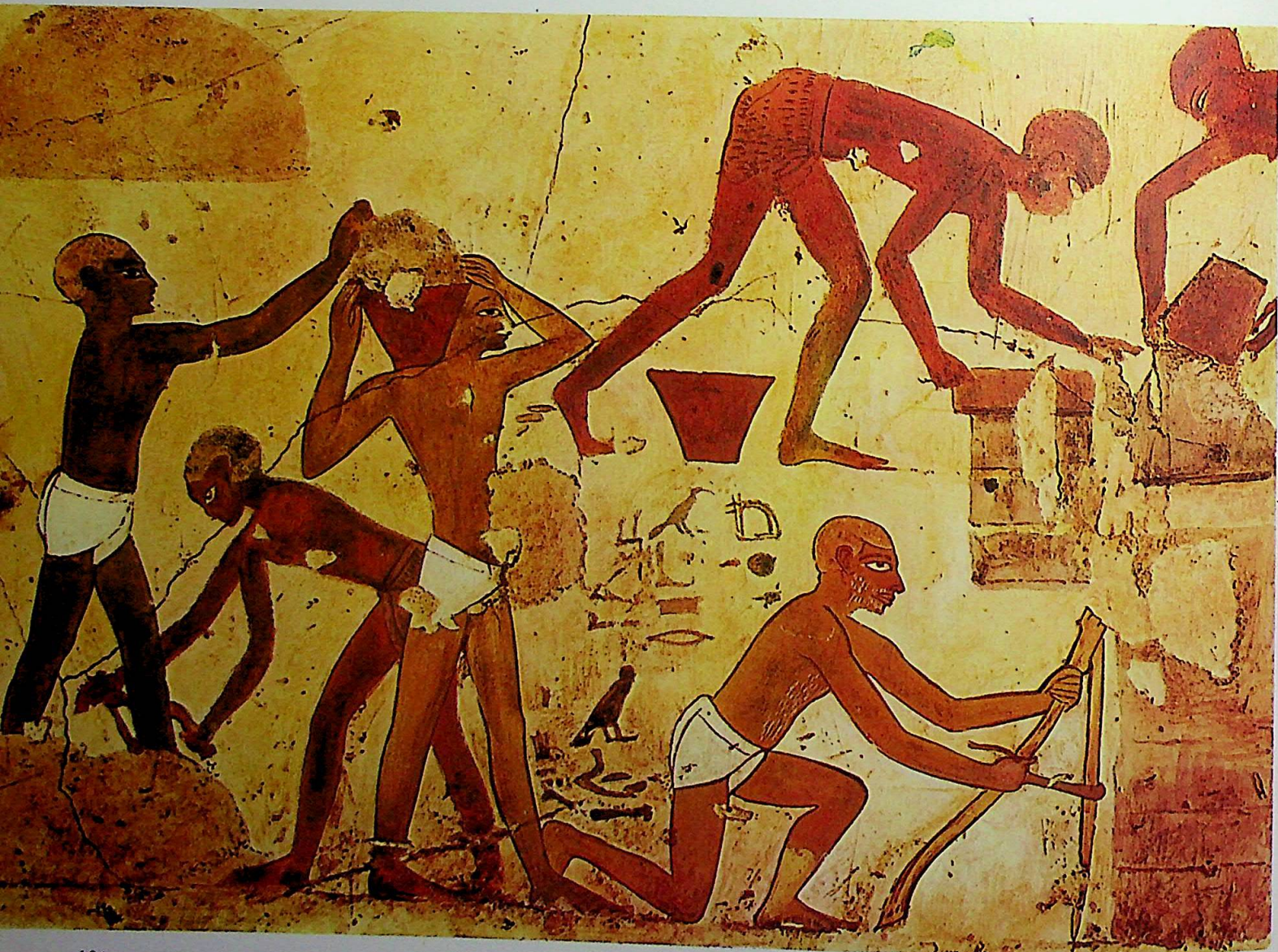
Although they depict scenes drawn from life, the majority of Egyptian illustrations are taken from tombs. They were therefore visible to only a few living people, and in some cases must have been sealed off altogether. It is important to realise the specialised function of art in ancient Egypt, if a true assessment of its achievements is to be made.

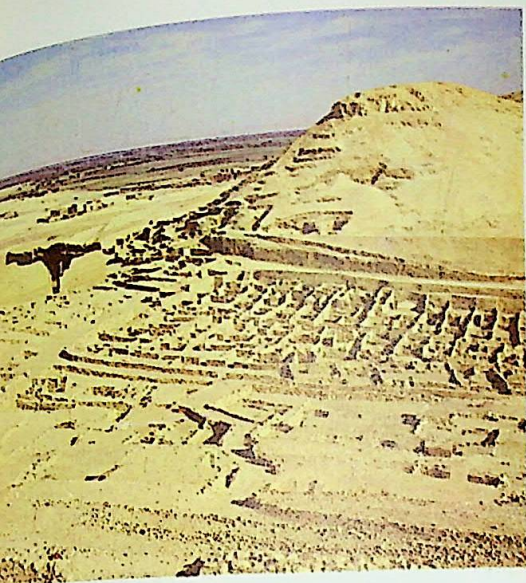
Two-dimensional art

In two-dimensional art (the representation on wall surfaces of scenes and inscriptions, carved in stone and then painted, or just painted if carving were not possible) the Egyptians adhered to a uniform style for

3000 years. It was not the result of casual evolution. In prehistoric times art was disorderly in composition, and relatively crude in execution. However, in the last phase of the prehistoric period a school of artists and craftsmen of considerable talent appeared. They are known principally from a series of slate palettes carved with scenes in low relief. One of the last examples, from the beginning of the First Dynasty, was carved in the carefully measured style which was to characterise Pharaonic Egypt.

This is a style so scrupulously academic that it can only have been developed as the result of deliberate experimentation and careful thought. Some of the motifs show resemblances to the art of southern Mesopotamia although this was ultimately a source only for inspiration and not for copying. The appearance of this style of art apparently coincided with the appearance of the first carved hieroglyphic inscriptions. This may not be accidental, since hieroglyphs conform to the same rigid rules of artistic composition as do the scenes which





they almost invariably accompany. Indeed the distinction between picture and text is a rather artificial one. The scenes on tomb and temple walls can often best be understood as greatly enlarged and complicated examples of a type of hieroglyphic sign—something which was added to words to make their meaning clearer. The relationship can be seen in the way in which the pictures are divided into scenes by horizontal lines, like rows of hieroglyphs.

Non-perspective drawing

Since Egyptian pictorial art normally had a religious context—summaries of rituals on temple walls, or pictures for the benefit of the dead—and was often the object of religious ritual, it was important to depict the subject matter as exactly as possible. Perspective drawing, which gives a photo-

graphic image, fails to do this since it introduces distortions which, although apparent to the human eye, are not actually present. Railway lines converging to a point on the horizon are after all only an optical illusion.

The Egyptians achieved their goal of objective truth in a more satisfactory way. Each component part of a scene was treated quite independently and depicted in its most characteristic, and therefore its truest, outline. No matter in what direction a figure might really be facing or moving, it would always be given the same shape. Relative size did not indicate distance from the viewer. A hare would be drawn much smaller than a donkey, but one donkey farther in the distance than another would still be the same size, which is quite logical since donkeys do not really increase in size as they draw nearer the person watching.

The same analytical attitude was to determine the shape of the individual parts of the scene. The characteristic shape of a bird is the profile of its body. However, the principal difference between a sparrow and a swallow is the shape of the tail feathers when seen from above. So the Egyptians drew the body in profile and added to it a top view of the tail feathers. In the case of the human figure this analysis went further.

The head was given its characteristic side view, the torso a front view, and the waist and legs a side view. The Egyptians' achievement was that they avoided carrying this approach to absurd conclusions. They drew the front view of an eye on the side of a face, but they refrained from adding the mouth in front view, although the hieroglyphic sign for mouth shows that a front view was thought the most characteristic.

Because of this restraint it is still possible to find pleasure in the skill the Egyptians



showed in producing balanced compositions and for their scrupulously neat workmanship. Another result of this approach was to diminish the amount of action in a scene since violent contortion was not counted as typical of man or beast. The



Bricks made from Nile mud and dried in the sun were the standard material used for all buildings other than those with a religious function.

Far left: a scene of brickmaking. The mud is trodden to the correct consistency, then carried to the brickmaker who presses it into a wooden mould and leaves the bricks on the ground to dry in the sun. One old man tightens his hoe against a stack of dried bricks.

Left: another man carries building materials of some sort by means of a yoke. (Tomb of Rekhmire. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Above left: a view of the village of the necropolis workmen at Deir el-Medina. Thebes, who were employed on the construction and decoration of the royal tombs. It is built of mud bricks mixed with stone chippings.

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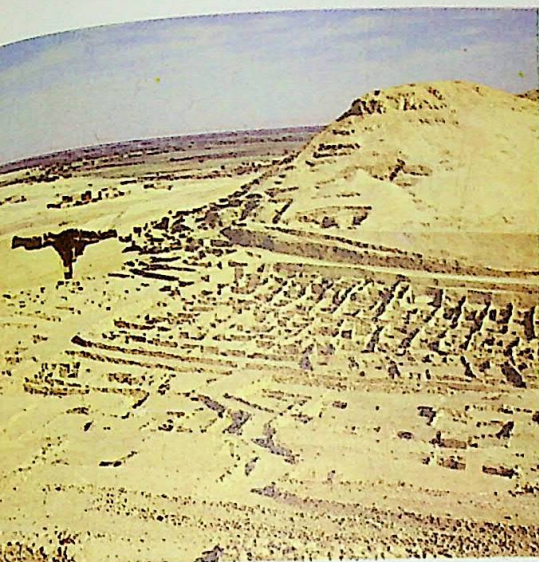
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placid, frozen appearance which resulted was perfectly in keeping with the religious context.

The uniformity of Egyptian art

In order to maintain the consistency of the style, which collected a sacred aura of its own, it was codified using a grid of squares. The human body for example, was eighteen squares tall with the shoulders, sixteen squares from the base. Students learnt draughtsmanship by the copying of models, and, although a whole scene in a tomb might need a preliminary grid drawn over the entire wall, constant practice made them exceptionally proficient in freehand drawing. Indeed, some of their practice pieces on rough flakes of limestone display a control of line and a freedom of expression which are outstanding by any standards.

However, the sacred nature and purpose of Egyptian art meant that a remarkably high standard of uniformity was achieved, with little room for individual experimentation. It may, however, be doubted whether artists were able to see any direction along which experimentation might proceed.

The art of Akhenaten's reign

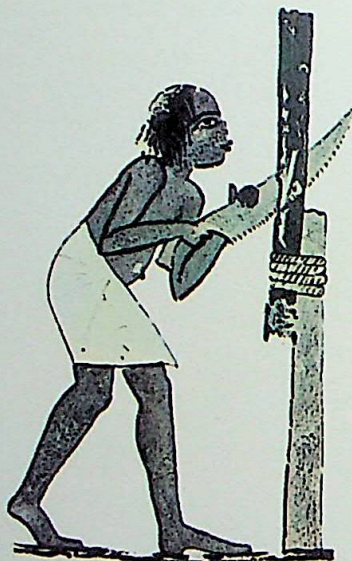
Akhenaten's innovations in religious practice were expressed very largely through art. One accidental effect of the capital's being at Thebes was the growth of a cemetery of courtiers' tombs hollowed in the Theban hills, where the rock was of too poor a quality for carving. Decoration was largely restricted to painting, and gradually the artists began to exploit the greater freedom which this medium offered, introducing a liveliness in the depiction of secondary figures which began to strain to the limit the framework of rules governing Egyptian art.

The period of Akhenaten's reign came as the climax to this movement. The principal monuments were undoubtedly the Aten temples, but these were subsequently demolished and the stones used in other temples. However, enough of these blocks have now been recovered to give an idea of the content of the scenes, which appear to have had much in common with the subject matter in courtiers' tombs at Amarna.

They illustrated the theme of the Aten as the universal giver of life. The manifold activities of life in Egypt were depicted with a freedom and pleasure in small detail which went even further than the products of the Theban tomb painters, although the style remained very recognisably Pharaonic. At the centre of all was the Aten stretching forth his rays towards elaborate representations of his temples and to figures of the king and royal family making offerings, praised by rows of obsequious courtiers. In the private tombs at least there were other scenes of the royal family eating or driving through the city.

The intimacy of these royal scenes is the

most startling departure of all, and also the most difficult to explain. It may have been an attempt to make royalty an easier object for adulation. Yet the features of Akhenaten are a gross caricature of convention. The long hanging jaw with fat lips, wide effeminate hips and swollen belly—all seem a deliberate travesty of the accepted features of the divine king. It is possible that he actually suffered from some deforming disease, yet in the colossal statues from his early temple at Karnak these mannerisms produce an effect of inscrutable, non-human power bordering on the malevolent and suggest rather a deliberate attempt to achieve an expression of divine kingship which went beyond the clothing of a man in the crowns and robes normally signifying kingship. However, in the end these artistic innovations, like the Aten cult itself, proved a passing eccentricity, and were submerged without trace in history.



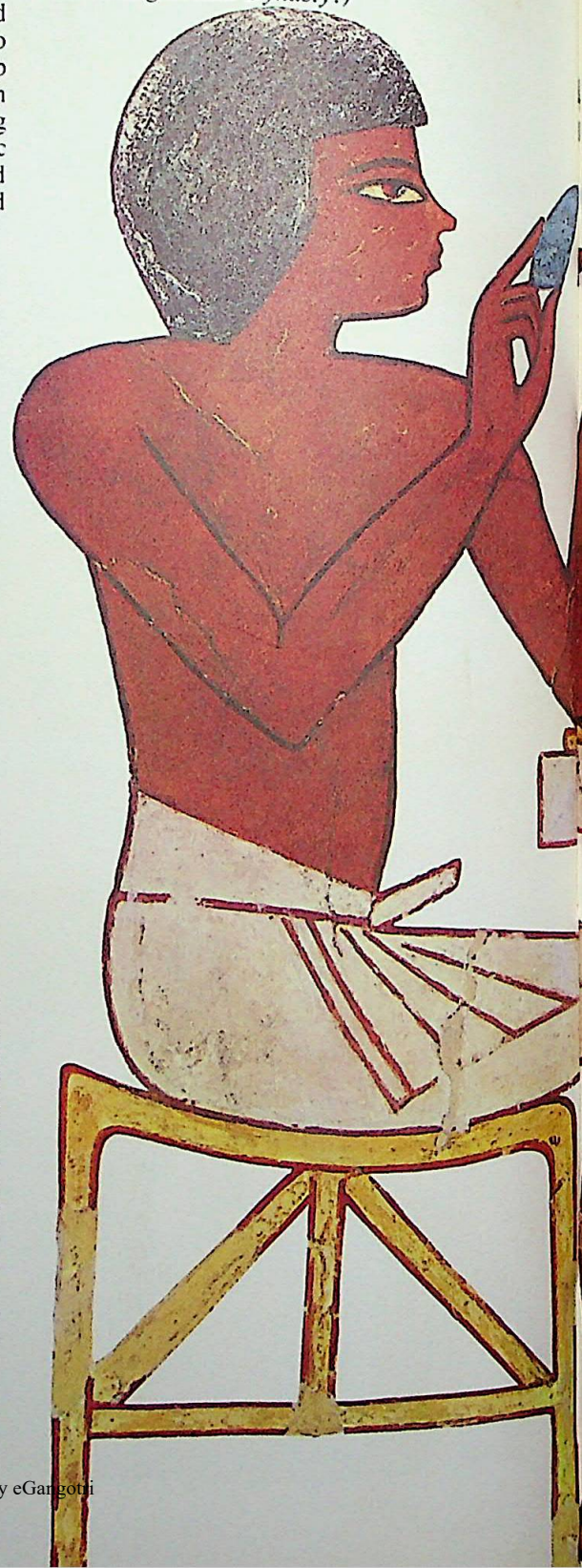
Statues

Egyptian statuary had a purpose even more limited than wall relief and painting. A statue was a home for a spirit: either a god in a temple or a king or private individual who would be able to receive offerings placed in front of them in a tomb, chapel or temple. Royal statues also had a limited application as architectural features in temples. Their form was based on specific formulae just as much as was two-dimensional art. They normally represent an idealised human form, youthful and confident, placidly waiting for the prayers and offerings which were their due. In some cases there are obvious attempts at portraiture, usually confined to the head, but this was not vital, for the identity of the statue lay in the owner's name carefully inscribed on it.

Statuary seems never to have been seen

Artisans at work in temple workshops. Below left: a carpenter saws a block of wood. Below: a goldsmith engraves the final details on a golden sphinx.

Opposite: various products of the workshops: a golden vessel, collars and bracelets of beads, a wooden chest and two religious symbols. A scribe carefully weighs the gold issued to the workmen in the form of circular ingots against a standard weight in the shape of a bull's head. (Tomb of the two temple sculptors, Apuki and Nebamun, Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)





as a vehicle for recording emotion or action, except perhaps the little wooden models of domestic and agricultural activity which for a time were included in the burial equipment. Some of the most highly individual works of statuary, apart from those of Akhenaten's reign, belong to the last six centuries B.C. The poses are as formal as before, but in the treatment of the head imagination has been given a wider scope to include the dignity of lined old age. Many show an amazing ability to render the detailed modelling of flesh and skull structure. Some seem intended to depict the brutality of temporal power.

Art for the living

The production of what are now regarded as works of art was a major industry designed to please the gods and the dead. Little, however, seems to have been done for the living. The art of wall decoration appears to have had a very limited application in domestic architecture. The courtiers' houses at Amarna had ceilings painted with bright patterns and gay friezes at the top of the walls containing fruit and flower patterns, but this was probably a luxury that few could afford. The houses of the necropolis workmen at Thebes were whitewashed except for small scenes of largely religious content painted around the household shrine. Only in the royal palaces are there traces of decoration to match the art of tombs and temples. The best preserved are from Amarna, with scenes of animal and bird life in the marshes, free from interference from god or man.

The Egyptians applied their artistic talents to objects of daily use: furniture, jewellery, cosmetic equipment and even weapons. They mostly show the same carefully controlled outlines, symmetry and formalism found in religious art. It may have

been this which inhibited the development of ceramics, the one art which relies most heavily on abstraction. The Egyptians produced great quantities of pottery, but it remained an unsophisticated utilitarian product, quite devoid of decoration.

Egyptian society

Marriage and the family

The basic unit of society was a family of husband and wife who set up their own independent household on marriage. Although there was no prohibition against a man possessing more than one wife, in practice monogamy seems to have been the rule. This is understandable in view of the serious nature of the written contract which secured the wife's property rights. Husband and wife contributed to the formation of a joint property for the establishment of an independent household. Either party could end the contract with a divorce, in which case the wife's share was restored to her, although adultery was punished by repudiation.

However, in all cases provision was made for children of the marriage. A defaulting

husband could also be liable for the payment of maintenance to the divorced wife. Even within the marriage the wife could arrange for the ultimate disposal of her own share of the joint property. One old woman left a will disinheriting her ungrateful children who failed to look after her.

Love and marriage

It is not known whether marriages were celebrated with something more than a legal agreement or to what extent they were arranged solely by parents, although among the lower classes this was probably usual.

However, a number of texts from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties have survived containing collections of songs or poems which deal with romantic life in terms which are instantly familiar. Some make extravagant comparisons with the beloved and others deal with the pains of unrequited love. In a few suggestive double meanings can be detected, as when a maiden invites her lover to share with her the

pleasures of bird-snaring in the fields. One description of love-sickness is particularly poignant. (It should be noted that the Egyptians used the words 'brother' and 'sister' as common terms of endearment.)

'Seven [days] to yesterday I have not seen the sister.

Sickness has invaded me, my limbs have grown heavy.

I am forgetful of myself.

If the master physicians come to me, my heart has no comfort in their remedies.

The magicians: there is no escape through them, my sickness is not recognised.

Telling me "Here she is" is what revives me, her name is what raises me up.

The entering and leaving of her messengers is what revives my spirits.

Of more benefit to me is the sister than all remedies.

She is more to me than the entire pharmacopoeia.

My recovery is her entering from without.

When I see her I am well.

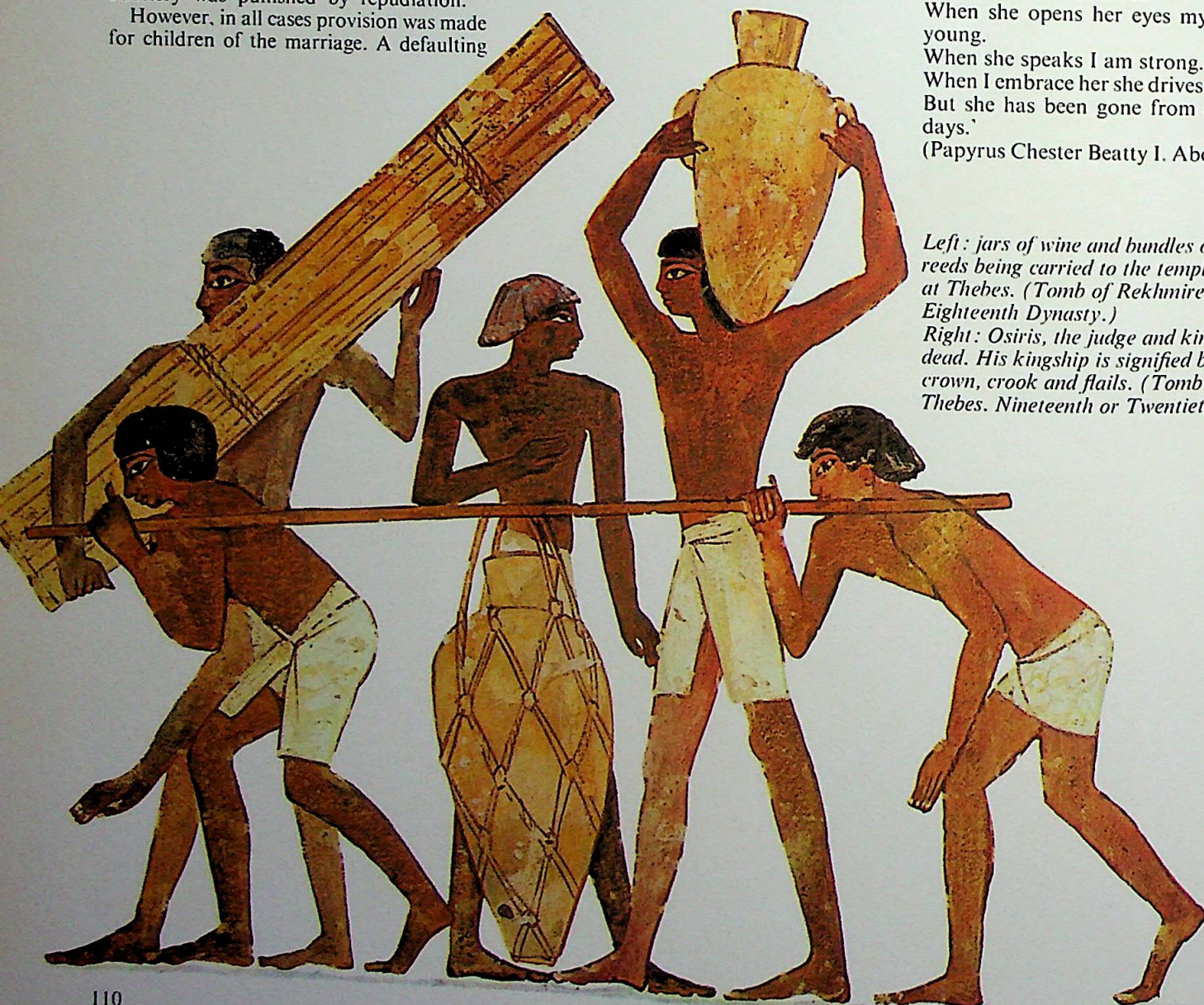
When she opens her eyes my body grows young.

When she speaks I am strong.

When I embrace her she drives evil from me.

But she has been gone from me for seven days.'

(Papyrus Chester Beatty I. About 1145 B.C.)



Left: jars of wine and bundles of papyrus reeds being carried to the temple of Amun at Thebes. (Tomb of Rekhmire. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Right: Osiris, the judge and king of the dead. His kingship is signified by the crown, crook and flails. (Tomb of Irinifer. Thebes. Nineteenth or Twentieth Dynasty.)





Education

The training of the young

For Egyptian children the key to a successful career was literacy. There is no evidence showing how a child gained admittance to the scribal schools, though personal connections were no doubt important. However, once there, pupils learnt how to write their language by copying out passages from classical literary texts. They often apparently learned the texts and then copied from memory, even at the beginning when what they wrote was unintelligible to them.

Copying from dictation also had a part in their training. These schoolboy exercises, often full of every kind of error, are sometimes the only source for some lost literary work. The pupils also copied models of the kinds of text they might be expected later to compose—letters, official reports, lists of royal titles, and praises of the king.

They might also find themselves copying enthusiastic compliments to their teacher (doubtless good practice for the future). Constant reminders on the need for diligence and on the penalties of idleness were included for good measure:

'I am told that you have abandoned writing and that you cavort about in pleasures. You go from street to street, the smell of beer everywhere you loiter. Beer makes one cease from being a man. . . . You have been taught to sing to the pipe, to chant to the flute. . . . But you sit in the house surrounded by harlots.'

'The ape brought from Kush understands words; lions can be trained, horses can be tamed. But as for you, no one like you can be discovered amongst the whole of mankind.'

'A boy's ear is on his back; he listens when it is beaten'

'I give you a hundred blows and you ignore

them all. You appear to me to be like a beaten ass that recovers in a day. You appear to me to be like a jabbering Nubian brought in with the tribute.'

The rewards were carefully spelt out:

'Be a scribe. It saves you from toil, it protects you from all manner of work. It spares you from bearing hoe and mattock.'

'Be a scribe. Your limbs will be sleek, your hands will grow soft. You will go forth in white attire, honoured with courtiers saluting you'.

Compare other professions: 'The potter is smeared with dirt like one whose folk have died. His hands and his feet are filled with clay. He is like one from the swamp. . . . The carpenter in the shipyard carries the timber and stacks it. If he should render yesterday's quota today, woe to his limbs! But the scribe, he it is who reckons up the labour of all of them.'

Left: the deceased tomb owner sits beneath a sycamore-fig tree with his wife and mother. They are waited on by the goddess of the tree, rising from a pool. (Tomb of Userhet. Thebes. Nineteenth Dynasty.)

Below: entertainment at a banquet. Two girls dance to the music of pipes played by a seated woman. (From a tomb at Thebes, now in the British Museum. Eighteenth Dynasty.)



A career as a scribe

Once he was trained as a scribe, there was no high office to which an Egyptian could not aspire, no matter how humble his beginnings, though it may be assumed that the right connections as well as the possession of ability aided promotion. The administration seems to have had an insatiable appetite for paper-work and the scribe could enter a wide variety of employments. There was financial administration—keeping accounts of agricultural produce for estate owners or making the assessments for the complicated taxation system.

The temples and the army had their own scribes: religious texts and official records had to be prepared; distant fortresses in foreign lands sent back the most detailed despatches. The legal system made its own enormous demands. The standard procedure for legal hearings or for registering a property deal or marriage settlement was a



declaration made before senior officials, perhaps accompanied by an oath, which was then copied down in writing, signed by witnesses and deposited in an archive. If the matter related to a previous settlement of some kind, the original document was looked up and copied down as a preamble. It is very apparent that the sheer bulk of accumulated documents must have been enormous.

The limitations of Egyptian thought

Many of these tasks required some specialised knowledge, and suitable books of instruction were compiled. Among them were treatises on mathematics which provide a valuable insight not only into the state of Egyptian mathematics, but also into the mental attitude of the Egyptians. They had evolved, probably entirely by trial and error, a set of solutions to the various problems of arithmetic and geometry which their accounting and building projects presented. The treatises simply list the problems one by one, giving a separate method of solution for each. It seems never to have occurred to the Egyptians that behind these solutions might lie theoretical generalisations which could be applied universally.

This is understandable since, with abstract thought, the Egyptians immediately entered

a world of personal, non-mechanical forces where mathematics was irrelevant. Nevertheless, they were able to devise methods for computing the areas of triangles, trapezoids, rectangles and circles, and also the volumes of cylinders, cubes and truncated pyramids. This knowledge was important for calculating such things as the amount of corn in grain bins, areas of fields for taxation purposes and amounts of stone for various stages in building pyramids. It is, however, characteristic of the Egyptians that, although they employed methods which involved a very close approximation to π , they remained unaware that such an abstraction existed. They could also handle the most complicated fractions, but either they could not conceive or did not see the need to develop a special system to express fractions whose numerator was not 1. Thus, if an Egyptian wished to multiply $\frac{1}{11}$ by 2, his answer would have been not $\frac{2}{11}$ but $\frac{1}{6} + \frac{1}{66}$. He would also probably have had to make use of one of the various sets of tables which had been specially developed for just this particular purpose.

The tasks of a scribe

The man who used the solutions in a mathematical treatise was not regarded as a mathematician or a specialist, but simply as a scribe performing a particular task. One composition included in the syllabus of some scribal schools—a satirical letter to an army scribe showing up his ignorance—indicates the peak of attainment to which a scribe should aspire: the ability to deal with any practical problem. In addition to knowing the ancient classics chapter and verse, the scribe should be able to calculate the distribution of rations to soldiers, estimate the number of bricks needed for a construction ramp, get together a team to fetch an obelisk from a quarry, supervise the erection of a colossus using exactly the right number of men needed to complete the task in the six hours between meals, and organise a foreign military expedition. The letter ends with a colourful lesson in Palestinian military geography. The interest of the Egyptians in acquiring an encyclopedic knowledge of places and names is also exemplified in long lists of words grouped into various categories, such as classes of people and occupations, types of building, parts of an ox, and extensive lists of place names in Egypt, the purpose being 'to clear



Hunting was a favourite pastime of the rich. Left: Tutankhamun charges a pride of lions in his chariot. (Painted wooden chest from the tomb of Tutankhamun at Thebes. Now in the Cairo Museum. Eighteenth Dynasty.) Right: two attendants carry spare harpoons for a fishing expedition—the artist appears to have confused the weapons with arrows. (Tomb of Kenamun. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Below: after a successful hunt for wild fowl in the marshes the hunter's daughter carries some of the catch and some lotus flowers. (Tomb of Menena. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)



the mind, to instruct the ignorant, to know everything that exists.' The compiler of the longest list known was a scribe of sacred books in a temple scriptorium.

Precepts and rules of etiquette

The term 'instructions' was used by the Egyptians for collections of edifying statements. These included pithy sayings about life in general, some with a definite moral content and some simply rules of etiquette. They were directed at the official who wished to be just in his dealings, and successful in his career. They formed part of the syllabus of scribal schools.

'If you are one to whom petition is made, be patient in listening to the speech of the petitioner. . . . A petitioner loves attention to his words more than the fulfilment of that about which he came.'

'Be not arrogant on account of your knowledge. . . . Good words are more hidden than green jasper, [yet] are found amongst maid-servants over the millstones.'

'Justice is great, its value enduring. It has not been disturbed since the days of him who created it. He who transgresses the laws is punished.'

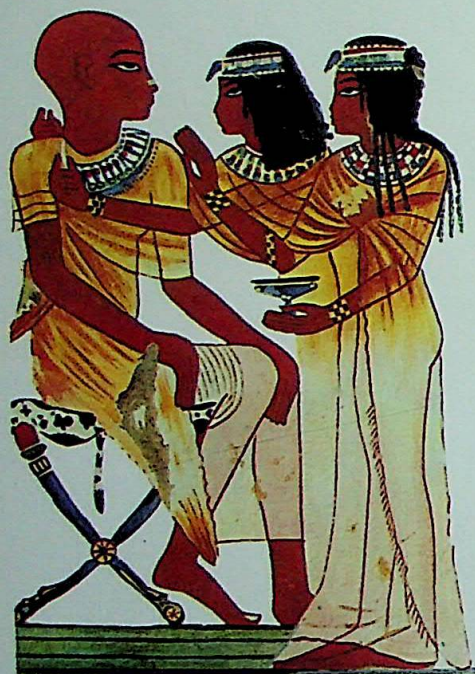
'If you are sitting at the table of someone greater than yourself, accept what he gives



when it is placed before your nose. You should stare at what is in front of you. Do not pierce him with many stares. . . . Let your face be cast down until he addresses you, speak when he does address you. . . . laugh when he laughs. It will be well pleasing in his heart.'

'If you desire to prolong friendship in a house into which you have admittance as a son, as a brother, or as a friend, wherever you enter beware of approaching the women. . . . One is made a fool by limbs of faience as she stands looking like carnelian. A fleeting moment, the likeness of a dream, [then] death overtakes you through having known her!'

'If you are a man of status, establish your household. You must love your wife with passion, fill her belly, clothe her back. Scented oil is the prescription for her body. Please her heart for as long as you live. She is a fertile field for her lord. . . . Keep her from control, be firm with her. Her eye can



be a storm wind when it looks. Soothe her heart with what accrues to you: this is how to keep her in your house.'

(Instruction of the vizier, Ptah-hetep. Fifth Dynasty. About 2450 B.C.)

The frank materialism of this collection of sayings, doubtless the cause of its popularity, is noticeably absent from a much later composition, the *Instruction of Amenemope*. Extant copies appear to date from the Twenty-first or Twenty-second Dynasties. The tone is far more philosophical and far humbler. The contrast between the confidence of the former and the resigned humility of the latter is a reflection of the moods of the two very different periods in which they were composed.

'Of more profit is poverty from the hand of god than riches in a storehouse.'

'Of more profit is bread when the heart is joyful than riches with sorrow.'

'If you find a large debt against a poor man, divide it into three parts.'

'Forgive two, let one remain. You will find that it is like the paths of life.'

'Do not spend the night fearful of the morrow.'

[Even] at dawn what will the morrow be like? A man cannot know what the morrow is like.'

'Do not speak falsely with men: the abomination of god!'

'God desires respect for the humble more than the honouring of the exalted.'

'Laugh not at a blind man nor taunt a dwarf, nor injure the affairs of the lame.'

'Taunt not a man possessed of god, nor laugh at him when he goes astray.'

'Man is but clay and straw; god is his builder, tearing down and building up every day.'

'He makes a thousand poor men as he wishes, he makes a thousand overseers in [just] an hour of his life.'

Judgement after death

Even Ptah-hetep's precepts reflect a code of social responsibility whose ultimate authority was a divine, eternally established justice, regarded as a tangible part of the universe. On pages 74-75 a passage was quoted on the responsibilities of kingship where a like theme was expressed and where a man was regarded as answerable after death for his transgressions. The theme of judgement after death became a standard part of magical papyri buried in tombs during and after the Eighteenth Dynasty, but was given a decidedly amoral twist. The purpose of these papyri, the so-called 'Book of the Dead', was to arm a person with magical spells sufficient to overcome all obstacles in the underworld. One of these was judgement in which the heart was weighed against a feather. A fearsome beast waited to consume anyone whose heart tipped the balance. To avoid this fate a spell was included to prevent the heart from giving an unsatisfactory performance.

There was also a text which contained a complete denial of forty-two specified sins. However, even the behaviour of gods could not be relied upon; and it is certain that thoughts of ultimate retribution must have disturbed the conscience of many an official.

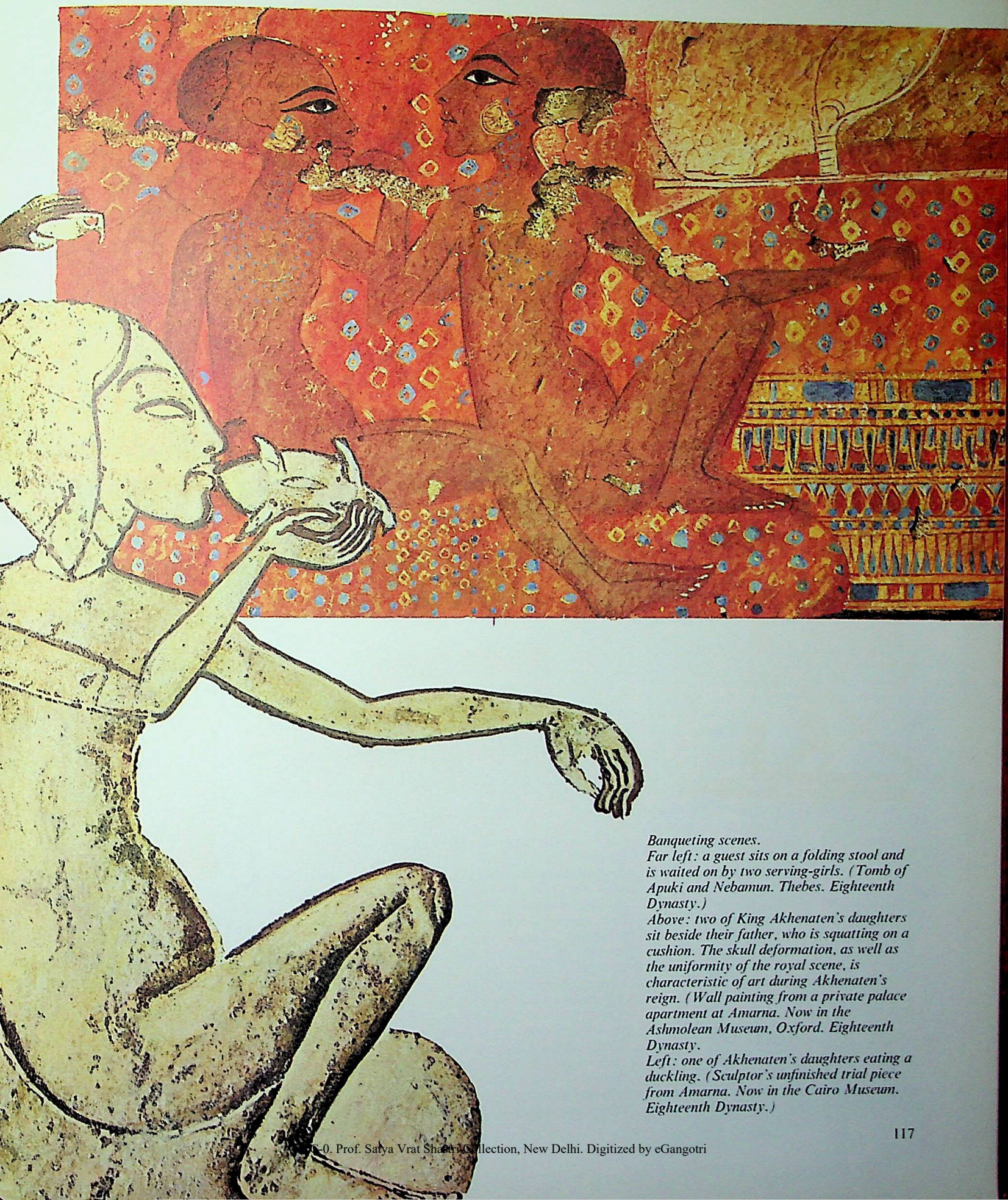
'Memorandum concerning their theft of five robes and ten plain garments, total fifteen, from the temple of Anukis, Lady of Aswan. The treasury scribe, Mentu-herkhepshef, who held the office of mayor of Elephantine, cross-examined them. He found that they had been in their possession, but they had sold them to Amenrekhy, an artisan from the 'Place of Truth', for a price.



This same mayor accepted bribes from them and released them.' (Turin Indictment Papyrus. About 1140 B.C.)

Literature

The Egyptians found time for literature whose purpose was simply to entertain and the fragments which have survived reveal a richly variegated tradition of story-telling. In many cases the stories have a message to impart, which would have increased the appreciation of the readers or listeners. One

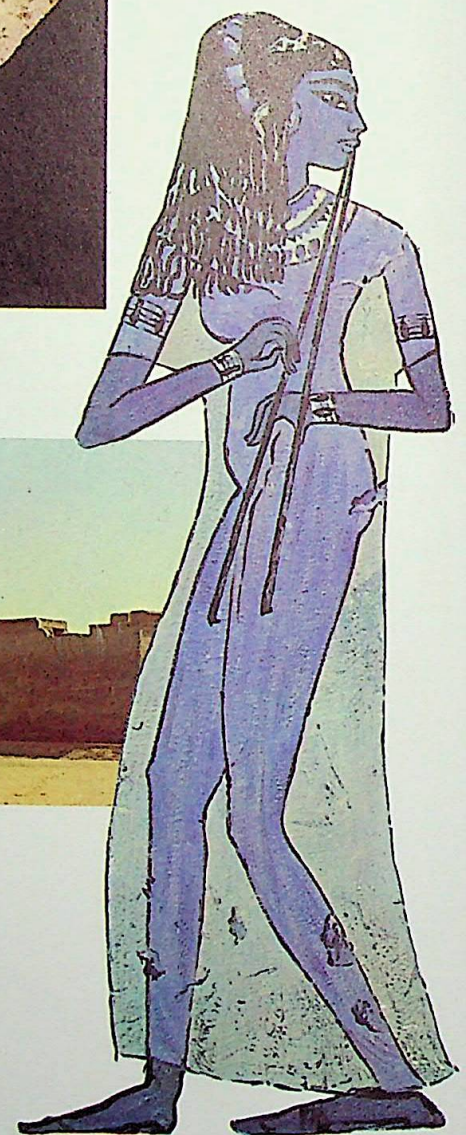
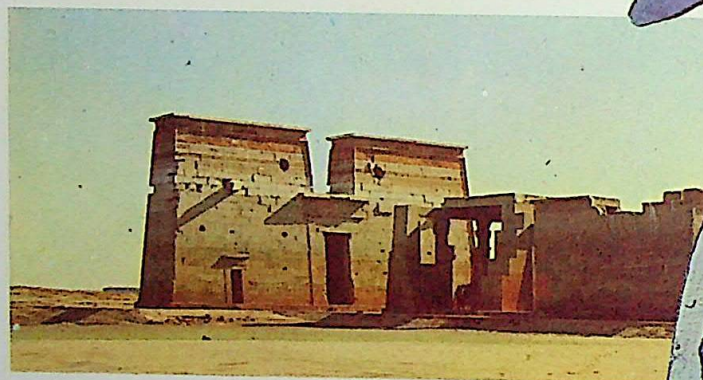


Banqueting scenes.

Far left: a guest sits on a folding stool and is waited on by two serving-girls. (Tomb of Apuki and Nebamun. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Above: two of King Akhenaten's daughters sit beside their father, who is squatting on a cushion. The skull deformation, as well as the uniformity of the royal scene, is characteristic of art during Akhenaten's reign. (Wall painting from a private palace apartment at Amarna. Now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Eighteenth Dynasty.)

Left: one of Akhenaten's daughters eating a duckling. (Sculptor's unfinished trial piece from Amarna. Now in the Cairo Museum. Eighteenth Dynasty.)



story tells of a sailor, shipwrecked on a magic island, where he is befriended by a giant, melancholy serpent. Another relates the adventures of a prince, predestined by fate to die through the agency of a crocodile, a snake, or a dog, and who sets off to seek his fortune abroad. Reaching a land beyond the Euphrates he wins a contest for the hand of a beautiful princess. She it is who saves him from the snake, but as the episode with the crocodile is reached the papyrus breaks off leaving the ending to be guessed. In some stories an allegorical meaning is very obvious. One relates a dispute between two brothers, Truth and Falsehood, in which Truth is blinded. He is, however, vindicated by his son, who secures in turn the blinding of Falsehood.

Although the texts are lost numerous illustrations survive from animal fables in which animals take the part of humans. Whatever instructive message they contained, it was heavily laced with satire. One is a very obvious burlesque of the standard temple scene showing the victorious king attacking an enemy fortress in his chariot, but here the chariot contains a mouse, and the fortress is manned by cats.

Commerce

The documents and monuments which have survived give the impression of a simple division of society between the considerable

body of literate men running the country for the divine king, and the illiterate peasantry who, though forming the bulk of the population, have survived only through their occasional appearance on the monuments of their superiors. One class of people is noticeably absent: merchants and shopkeepers who made an independent living through private trading. Superficially the explanation seems simple. At the level of day-to-day subsistence simple barter sufficed. From the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties there is considerable information about relative values, which could also be expressed absolutely in terms of gold, silver, copper, or corn units. Thus, one wooden adze handle could be exchanged for one jar of beer plus a goat-skin, which were together



Further banquet entertainment. Opposite: a female acrobat. (Sketch on a limestone flake. Turin Museum. New Kingdom.) A woman wearing a semi-transparent gown plays the pipes while two young girls dance to them (right). Above: the lady of the house in the final stages of her toilet, waited on by naked

serving-girls. (Tomb of Djoserkare-seneb. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.) The temple opposite in the background is at Dakka in Lower Nubia. It was built partly by Ptolemy IV, Philopater, in the middle of the third century B.C. The gateway between the two 'pylon' towers is a characteristic feature of Egyptian architecture.

worth the same in copper units as the handle.

At the other end of the scale the import of foreign produce, both through trade and by direct exploitation, such as mining in Sinai or Nubia, appears to have been a royal monopoly, or at least, surviving records commemorate only missions sent out by the king. In the case of mining expeditions it is easy to accept the evidence at its face value since these expeditions were of a semi-military nature. It is also clear that the temples engaged in internal trade since the resources they owned were so many and varied, and there are explicit references from the period following the Eighteenth Dynasty to traders attached to particular temples.

Even the log-book of one freighter engaged in internal trade that appears to have belonged to the estate of Ptah, god of Memphis.

Trading Activities

Private biographical inscriptions from tombs and lists of titles held in the administration relate almost exclusively to tasks performed for the king and the gods. Other more personal activities were quite inappropriate. However, it seems clear that private commercial activity flourished, from occasional references in secular literature from the post-Eighteenth Dynasty period to traders





and even to Nile freighters in the charge of private individuals. One scribal exercise of the Nineteenth Dynasty, a letter of praise apparently addressed to the teacher, even refers to private ownership of vessels trading abroad: 'Your ship has arrived from Syria laden with all manner of good things.' Once again we are made aware that the basic structure of Egyptian society is not necessarily reflected accurately in the principal written sources.

Personal liberty

The status of the literate administrative class is fairly clear: their rights as individuals and as property owners were carefully guarded by laws. Within the limitations of ancient societies they were free men. The great landed estates of the king, of the temples and of the senior officials and nobility possessed large numbers of dependents over whom their owner or employer had a considerable amount of control. One example comes from a text listing ninety-five dependents in an Upper Egyptian household of the Thirteenth Dynasty. Two thirds were women and more than half were Asians. The men were employed as house-boys, field hands, brewers, cooks, tutors

and sandal-makers, the women as makers of cloth (at least twenty of them), household storekeepers, gardeners and hairdressers.

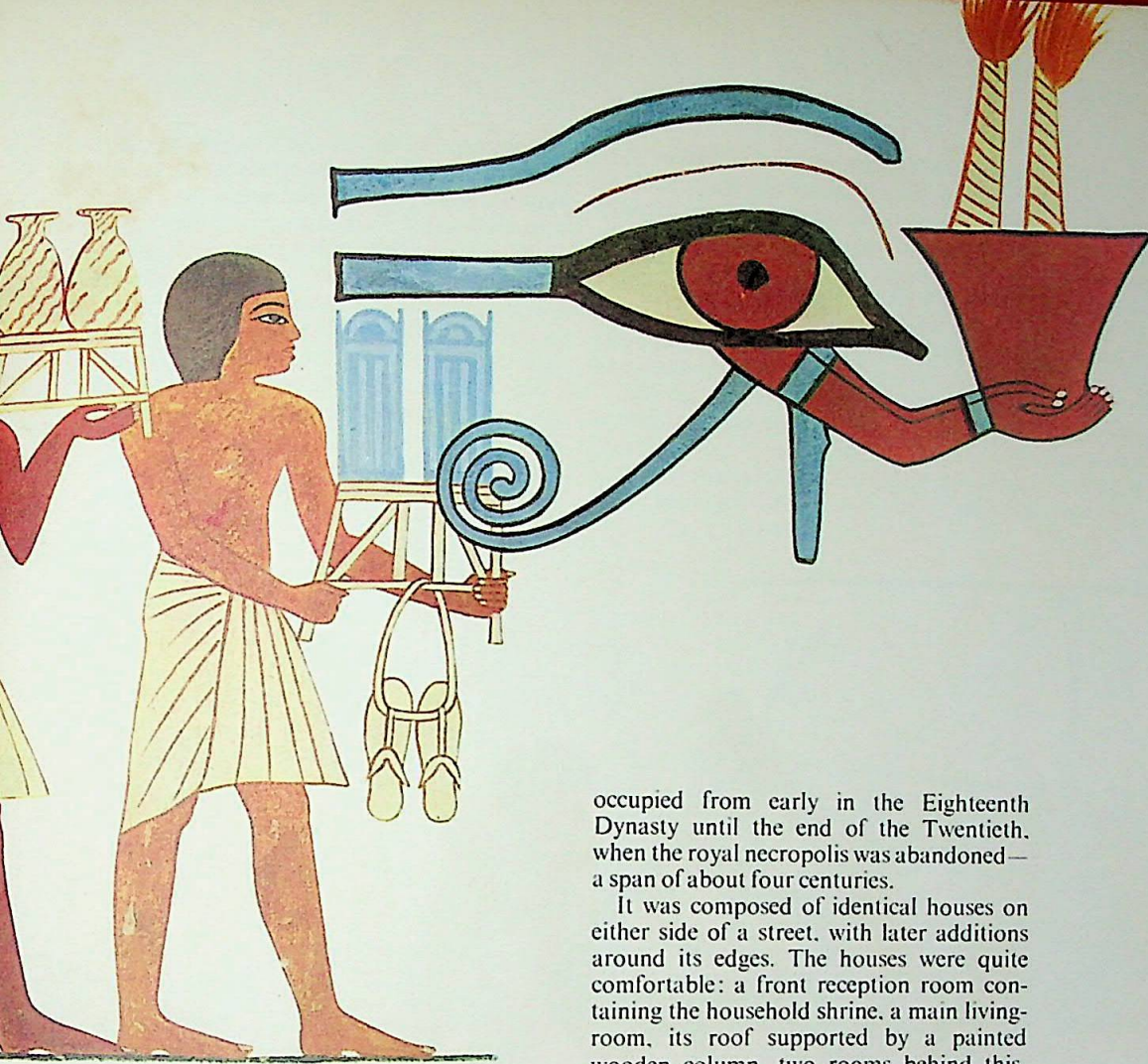
The list is part of a legal document recording successive transfers of ownership. At first these servants belonged to an official whose disgrace had led to the confiscation of his property. They were then passed to another official, who first had to petition the king for them, and then made them over to his wife by a deed of gift. From the point of view of ownership their status is clear: they are listed alongside movable property, fields and a house. Little is known, however, of the degree of authority which their owner had over them. From the period following the Eighteenth Dynasty, for example, it is known that servants could own and dispose of their own property, including land. Perhaps it was just a person's labour that was owned. Naturally under a generous owner a servant could do well. In one instance a servant girl's daughter was allowed to marry the owner's brother, becoming a free woman and, with her husband, an heir to the owner's estate.

Sources of labour

People in a similar condition, permanently attached to temples and royal establishments, their numbers continually swollen by prisoners of war, formed a permanent pool of labour for the construction of monuments, often aided by army contingents. In this capacity they were fed and housed. What is probably a town of builders and permanent workers belonging to the pyramid of a Twelfth Dynasty king at Lahun has survived in a fairly intact state. It was carefully planned and composed of rectangular units. There were large mansions for administrators, and for labourers row upon row of terrace houses, small but far from cramped.

Conscription of labour

However, if this labour force proved insufficient for building or agricultural work, the government had authority to conscript people from many walks of life to labour without reward for a specific period. While engaged on this work they might live in a government labour camp. Absconding carried with it the penalty of permanent servitude for the guilty man, his family and



occupied from early in the Eighteenth Dynasty until the end of the Twentieth, when the royal necropolis was abandoned — a span of about four centuries.

It was composed of identical houses on either side of a street, with later additions around its edges. The houses were quite comfortable: a front reception room containing the household shrine, a main living-room, its roof supported by a painted wooden column, two rooms behind this, and then a small yard. Outside the village were a communal water cistern, chapels for the various deities and the tombs of the villagers rising in terraces up the sides of the valley. The tombs show the affluence of the villagers: they are often quite large with their own chapel and pyramid, decorated inside, and some contained fairly rich sets of burial equipment. The site has also yielded innumerable scraps of pottery and limestone used as a cheap substitute for papyrus in recording the daily events and dealings of the inhabitants. From these a remarkably complete account of their life can be reconstructed.

descendants. For work on large monuments it is possible that forced labour was confined to the summer when agricultural work was at a minimum. One advantage of being a scribe was to avoid this fate. Yet so unpopular was it that fear of it pursued all classes beyond the grave and led to the burial in the tomb of little magical figures equipped with tools, who could labour on the owner's behalf.

The community at Deir el-Medina

Living conditions

Fortunately, considerable documentation is available about one group of workmen permanently in the employ of the king, although as skilled craftsmen they appear to have had unusually high status. Their relative freedom is itself an illustration of how misleading it can be to generalise too broadly about Egyptian society. These were the men who excavated and decorated the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes and must have included craftsmen of the highest ability. Their village has survived remarkably intact in a little valley behind the mortuary temple of Rameses III and is now known as Deir el-Medina. It was

Top left: a line of porters bearing the equipment to be buried in the tomb to provide for a comfortable life in the next world. It includes a bed with headrest, a stool and chair, wooden chests perhaps containing linen, vases of unguent, sandals, and a scribe's writing-kit. (Tomb of Ramose, Thebes, Eighteenth Dynasty.) In front of the porters, the sacred eye of the falcon-god, Horus, makes an offering of burning incense to Osiris, the ruler of the underworld. (Tomb of Pashed, Thebes, Nineteenth or Twentieth Dynasty.) Right: an Egyptian infantryman of the Eighteenth Dynasty carrying a battle axe, shield and spear. (Mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut, Thebes.)



Working conditions

On average the work force consisted of about sixty men organised into two gangs. Each was in the charge of a foreman assisted by a deputy, and the inevitable scribe kept a close watch on everything: on the progress of the work, on the number and weight of copper tools issued to workmen, and on the absentees. They worked for nine days at a stretch, sleeping in little huts in front of the tomb they were preparing. They returned to their village, which lay on the other side of a high ridge, only on their free day, or on the

holidays which the principal religious festivals provided. Their work was regularly inspected by the vizier, their ultimate superior, or by one of his deputies.

Methods of payment

In return for this work they were paid a regular monthly wage in kind, drawn largely from the revenues collected by the great mortuary temples at Thebes, such as that of Rameses II. The basic payment was made in grain, emmer for bread, and barley for beer, although both could be bartered for other articles. They were also supplied with

quantities of fish, firewood, vegetables, oil and cloth, and with irregular bonuses of luxuries such as wine and meat, and beer imported from Asia. The amount of payment varied with status, the scribe, for example, receiving half the rations of the foreman, and often less than the workmen themselves. Some of the workmen's needs were also met by dependents: a potter, water-carriers, washermen, fishermen and slave girls for grinding corn.

They were allowed to exercise considerable control over their own affairs. Petty crime was judged and punished by a



council drawn from members of the village, and their various religious cults, including the dead king, Amenhetep I, who acted as an oracle for even trivial decisions, were served by priests selected from their own number.

Their relative independence is made clear from a papyrus dating from the reign of Rameses III. On successive occasions the workmen demonstrated against the non-payment of their wages by leaving their work and sitting down (on at least one occasion with their families) behind the various mortuary temples which provided their

wages. Their object in doing this seems to have been to bring their plight to the attention of senior officials such as the mayor of Thebes or the vizier.

This little community is a reminder that ancient Egypt possessed a complex society of living human beings whose lives were by no means characterised by the ponderous monuments of their rulers.

The Nile was the principal means of transport in ancient times. The prevailing north wind enabled ships to sail upstream. On the return journey they could float down on the current, or increase their speed by using oars. The gaily painted tug boat, below, is towing a barge by which the deceased tomb owner is able to make a pilgrimage to Abydos, centre of the cult of Osiris. (Tomb of Pere, Thebes, Eighteenth Dynasty.) The other boat is from the tomb of Menena at Thebes, Eighteenth Dynasty.



Tribute from Nubia: ingots of gold in the form of rings, bags of gold dust, a leopard skin, giraffe tails and a baby male giraffe. (Tomb of Huy. Thebes. Eighteenth Dynasty.)



Egypt's Legacy

In the year 30 B.C. Queen Cleopatra of Egypt committed suicide. A major threat to the newly emergent Roman empire had gone, and with it a last opportunity for Egypt itself to become yet again the centre of an empire. Far to the north, on the misty perimeter of the known world, Celtic Britain was still in its last century of independence before the final Roman conquest of A.D. 43. So much that is basic in our own inheritance had not begun to take shape. Yet Cleopatra was the heiress to a civilisation which stretched back into antiquity for

a period longer by a thousand years than the period which separates Cleopatra from ourselves. Fourteen centuries before her birth the Egyptian empire had reached its maximum extent, but even to the Egyptians of this period the early pyramid builders were legendary figures from a remoter past. Their great monuments were an invitation to the curious to scribble their names on walls, which had already been standing for 1,000 years.

The Greeks and Romans entered a civilised world which was already old. They did not invent from nothing the ideas and patterns of life on which our own civilisation

is built. Complex, literate societies with rich, well-organised resources, supporting artists and scholars who had long traditions of experiment and intellectual enquiry, were the main feature of the ancient Near East. They had already progressed far from man's primitive beginnings. The Greeks and Romans inherited the achievements of this world; their own achievement is that they were able to break out of the intellectual inhibitions which seemed inbred in their predecessors. Egypt formed a major part of this fertile matrix, and the remarkable continuity and homogeneity of its culture have made it one of the easiest to study.

EGYPT FROM 4000 B.C. TO ROMAN TIMES

	Pharaonic dynasties	Domestic history	External history	Culture
Fourth millennium B.C.		Two kingdoms: Upper and Lower Egypt		
3300	Prehistoric monarchy	Unification of Egypt? Kings of top row of Palermo Stone	Cultural influence from Sumer and Elam felt in Egypt	Prehistoric cultures Copper in use in Upper Egypt
3200	ARCHAIC PERIOD (3200-2700) 1st Dynasty	Later king lists commence with Menes Rebellion in delta	Trade relations with Byblos already established Armies reach 2nd Cataract	First written records, Narmer Palette First monumental brick architecture
	2nd Dynasty	Civil war?		
2700	OLD KINGDOM (2700-2150) 3rd Dynasty Djoser		First recorded expedition to Sinai mines	Step Pyramid of Djoser at Sakkara
2600	4th Dynasty			
	Sneferu Khufu (Cheops) Khafra (Chephren) Menkaura (Mycerinus)			First true pyramid Pyramids and Sphinx at Giza
2500			Egyptian copper smelting town in Nubia (Buhen)	
2400	5th Dynasty	Growth of provincial autonomy in Upper Egypt	Trade caravans to southern Nubia	Tombs of Ti, Ptahhetep, Akhetetep, and Mereruka at Sakkara Pyramid texts
2300	6th Dynasty			
2200	Pepi I and II			
	FIRST INTER-MEDIATE PERIOD (2150-1991) 7th and 8th Dynasties			
2100				
	9th/10th Dynasty of Herakleopolis 11th Dynasty of Thebes	First Theban revolt ended by about 2030		Tombs of kings and nobility at Thebes
2000				
	MIDDLE KINGDOM (1991-1786) 12th Dynasty Amenemhat I Senusret I Amenemhat II Senusret II Senusret III Amenemhat III Amenemhat IV	Thebans masters of Egypt New capital of Amenemhat-ith-tawy founded	Renewed activity at Sinai mines, renewed relations with Byblos Nubian fortress chain constructed Egyptian influence at Byblos particularly marked	First preserved literary texts First widespread use of bronze Painted tombs at Beni Hasan Revival of pyramid building in brick Probably land reclamation in Faiyum
1900				
1800				
	SECOND INTER-MEDIATE PERIOD (1786-1575) 13th Dynasty	Upper Egypt at least still ruled from Amenemhat-ith-tawy		
1700				
	Dynasty of six Hyksos kings	Egypt ruled from Avaris in eastern delta	Palestine probably under Hyksos rule Kingdom of Kush	Small royal tombs at Thebes
1600	17th Dynasty of Thebes	Second Theban revolt ended		
	NEW KINGDOM (1575-1807) 18th Dynasty Ahmose Amenhetep I Tuthmosis I	Avaris captured Capital at Thebes	Hyksos pursued into Palestine Boundary inscriptions at Euphrates and in Nubia	First tomb in Valley of the Kings Deir el-Bahri temple
1500	Tuthmosis II Queen Hatshepsut Tuthmosis III	Illegal seizure of power	Palestine and Syria administered as an empire	

	Pharaonic dynasties	Domestic history	External history	Culture
1400	Amenhetep III Amenhetep IV (Akhenaten) Tutankhamen Aye Horemheb	Religious revolution New capital built at Amarna Cult of Amen restored	Loss of northern part of the empire	Luxor temple, Colossi of Memnon Artistic revolution Tomb in Valley of the Kings preserved intact
1300	19th Dynasty Seti I Rameses II	Capital at Per-Rameses in eastern delta	Battle of Kadesh Egyptian-Hittite treaty Israelite Exodus? Libyan invasion crushed	Temple at Abydos Enormous building programme: Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, Abu Simbel temple, Ramesseum at Thebes
1200	Merenptah	Death from harem conspiracy	Defeat of invasion by Peoples of the Sea, and by Libyans Egyptian empire fades away	Medinet Habu temple Last tombs in Valley of the Kings
1100		Tomb robbery trials at Thebes		
	20th Dynasty Rameses III			
	21st Dynasty (1807-945)	Kings rule from Tanis in eastern delta Effective rule of Upper Egypt in hands of High Priests of Amen		Royal tombs at Tanis
1000				
	22nd Dynasty (945-730) Sheshonk I	Libyan kings Period ends in anarchy 23rd Dynasty at Thebes	Sheshonk I (Shishak) attacks Jerusalem in 930	Royal tombs at Tanis
900				
800				
	25th Dynasty (730-656) Plankhy	Invaders from Napata in the Sudan		
700	Taharka	Rebellions against Assyrian occupation	Esarhaddon of Assyria invades in 671 Assur-bani-pal of Assyria invades in 667	Artistic revival begins Pyramid tombs at Napata
	26th Dynasty (664-525) Psamtik Neko II Psamtik Wahibre Ahmose II	Capital at Sais in delta	Circumnavigation of Africa	First demotic texts Greek trading colony established at Naukratis
600				
	27th Dynasty (525-404) Cambyses Darius	Egypt a Persian province	Cambyses of Persia invades in 525	Nile-Red Sea canal completed Herodotus visits Egypt Jewish colony at Elephantine
500	Xerxes Artaxerxes I			
	28th and 29th Dynasties (404-380)	Egyptian kings		
400				
	30th Dynasty (380-343) Nekhtnebef Nekhthorheb			
	'31st Dynasty' (343-332)	Egypt again a Persian province	Artaxerxes III of Persia invades	
300 200 100	Ptolemaic period Egypt a Roman province	Capital at Alexandria Death of Cleopatra VII in 30	Alexander Battle of Actium	Manetho Greek language widely adopted Last Pharaonic temples built

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Acknowledgments

9 Golaz; 13 Top, Holmè-Lebel; 14 Louvre Museum; 15 Left, Aleppo Museum. Right, Hayaux du Tilly; 16-17 Louvre Museum; 17 Top and bottom, John Webb; 18-19 John Webb; 19 Top, Louvre Museum. Bottom, John Webb; 20 Top and bottom, John Webb; 21 Left, John and Webb. Right, Museum of Baghdad; 22 Top, Louvre Museum. Centre, Held; 22-23, 24 Louvre Museum; 26 British Museum; 27, 28 David Hawkins; 30 Ankara Museum; 32 Josse; 34 David Hawkins; 35 Left, Louvre Museum. Right, Ankara Museum; 37 Aleppo Museum; 38 Top, British Museum. Bottom, Louvre Museum; 39 John Webb; 40 British Museum; 41 Top, Hayaux du Tilly. Centre and bottom, British Museum; 42 Louvre Museum; 44-45, 45 British Museum; 46-47 Top, British Museum; 48 Louvre Museum; 50 British Museum; 51 Right, Ankara Museum; 52-53 Louvre Museum; 54-55 British Museum; 55 Above, British Museum. Below, Berlin Museum; 56-57, 58 British Museum; 60 Max Hirmer; 64 Cairo Museum; 65 Holmès-Lebel; 66 Louvre Museum; 66-67 Above, Golaz. Below, Cairo Museum; 67 Butler; 68 Louvre Museum; 69 Butler; 70-71 Louvre Museum; Berlin Museum; 72-73 Above and below, Musée Guimet; 74 Yvan Butler; 75 Cairo Museum; 76 Louvre Museum; 76-77 Musée Guimet; 77 Louvre Museum; 80 Yvan Butler; 82 Cairo Museum; 82-83 Henri Stierlin; 84 Cairo Museum; 85 Above, Louvre Museum. Below, Naud; 87 Cairo Museum; 90 British Museum; 91 Left, Louis-Frédéric. Right, Yvan Butler; 94 Above, Merle. Below, Held; 107 Hassia; 113 British Museum; 114-115 Cairo Museum; 117 Top, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Bottom, Cairo Museum; 118 Top, Turin Museum. Centre, Yvan Butler.

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